

VOLODYMYR IVASIUK AND THE ENSEMBLE “CHERVONA RUTA”: CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOUNDATIONS OF UKRAINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POP MUSIC DEVELOPMENT

Olesia Iliencko

Postgraduate Student, Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Ukraine
e-mail: olesia.i.iliencko@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-8082-2578

Summary

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the creative legacy of Volodymyr Ivasiuk and the activities of the ensemble *Chervona Ruta* as pivotal phenomena in the socio-cultural and musical history of Ukraine in the second half of the 20th century. The study highlights the formation of the ensemble, its landmark performances, and its contribution to the development of Ukrainian pop music. Particular attention is given to the emergence of a new musical style that fused elements of traditional folklore with contemporary pop trends, thereby promoting Ukrainian culture on both national and international levels. A significant focus is placed on the symbolism and ideological dimensions of the songs composed by Ivasiuk and performed by *Chervona Ruta*. Through an analysis of lyrics and musical structures, the study demonstrates the deep connection of their work to national traditions, which served as a means of preserving Ukrainian identity under the harsh conditions of Soviet censorship. Ivasiuk's compositions, such as *Chervona Ruta* and *Vodohrai*, are examined not only as cultural artifacts but also as instruments of ideological resistance, fostering social cohesion around national values. The article also addresses the contemporary reevaluation of Ivasiuk's and *Chervona Ruta*'s legacy in the context of independent Ukraine. Their contribution to the foundations of Ukrainian national identity remains highly relevant amidst the challenges of globalization and cultural transformations. This body of work represents a vital element of Ukrainian musical history and a key aspect of the ongoing process of national self-awareness, underscoring its significance in the contemporary socio-cultural paradigm.

Key words: Volodymyr Ivasiuk, ensemble "Chervona Ruta", national identity, pop music, cultural heritage, social unity, globalization.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/6707>

1. Introduction

The examination of Volodymyr Ivasiuk's creative legacy and the activities of the ensemble *Chervona Ruta* in the context of shaping Ukrainian national identity holds significant relevance amidst contemporary socio-cultural transformations. During the period of revitalizing national self-awareness and reinterpreting historical and cultural heritage, the study of phenomena that facilitated the affirmation of Ukrainian culture under the ideological constraints of the Soviet era becomes a matter of strategic importance. The popular music of the second half of the 20th century, particularly Ivasiuk's oeuvre, functioned not merely as a medium of artistic expression but also as a form of cultural resistance. It played a pivotal role in safeguarding national traditions, promoting the Ukrainian language, and fostering social cohesion. Ivasiuk's compositions, including *Chervona Ruta* and *Vodohrai*, transcended their status as cultural artifacts to become enduring symbols of Ukrainian identity, maintaining their significance to this

day. In the face of globalization and its associated trends toward cultural homogenization, the scholarly exploration of Ivasiuk's contributions to the evolution of Ukrainian musical traditions provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the preservation of national identity. By analyzing his creative output, this research elucidates the role of artists as catalysts for national consolidation and contributes to the theoretical framework for interpreting cultural and historical processes that shape national identity in the modern era.

Analysis of recent research. The artistic legacy of Volodymyr Ivasiuk and the cultural contributions of the "Chervona Ruta" ensemble represent pivotal milestones in the emergence and development of Ukrainian pop music as a distinct and influential cultural phenomenon. Their work was marked by a sophisticated synthesis of traditional folk elements and contemporary musical innovations, facilitating the integration of Ukrainian popular music into the global musical landscape while preserving its national identity. In the monograph *"Echoes of Your Steps"*, authors H. Ivasiuk, O. Ivasiuk, and L. Krysa underscore the innovative nature of Volodymyr Ivasiuk's compositional style, which successfully recontextualized folk motifs into modern musical frameworks, making them accessible to a wide and diverse audience (Ivasiuk, H., Ivasiuk, O., & Krysa, L., 2011). Iconic compositions such as "Chervona Ruta" and "Vodohrai" not only became emblematic of Ukrainian pop music but also established new artistic standards by combining melodic richness, profound lyrical content, and nationalistic themes, thereby imbuing Ukrainian popular music with new cultural and artistic significance.

The contribution of the "Chervona Ruta" ensemble, led by Levko Dutkovskyyi, was instrumental in the popularization of Ivasiuk's works and the broader development of Ukrainian pop music. In his article *"If We Had Not Been Broken Up One by One..."*, Dutkovskyyi emphasizes that the ensemble functioned as a vital creative platform, enabling experiments with Ukrainian musical material through the integration of modern arrangements, diverse genres, and avant-garde musical techniques (Dutkovskyyi, L., 2008). Despite facing numerous ideological and institutional challenges, the ensemble successfully expanded the artistic boundaries of Ukrainian song, elevating it to the level of global pop music while maintaining a strong connection to national cultural roots.

The sociocultural implications of Ivasiuk's music are equally significant, extending beyond its artistic qualities to its role in shaping national identity and consciousness. As highlighted in the publication *"We, Ukrainians..."*, Ivasiuk's songs not only fulfilled an aesthetic function but also carried an inherently didactic purpose, helping to foster a sense of national unity and cultural pride amidst the pressures of political and cultural assimilation during the Soviet era (Masliy, M., 2014, March 3). The lyrical imagery and symbolic depth of his compositions allowed them to resonate as both a continuation of folk traditions and an innovative departure, bridging the past and present, and thus ensuring their relevance across generations.

Moreover, Ivasiuk's impact continues to reverberate in contemporary cultural discourse. In the online resources *"Pages of Memory of Volodymyr Ivasiuk"* and *"Top-5 Interesting Facts"*, Ivasiuk's lasting influence on the cultural and musical identity of Ukraine is emphasized, particularly in the context of modern national consciousness and the ongoing renewal of the Ukrainian musical heritage (Masliy, M., 2009). Ivasiuk's seminal work "Chervona Ruta" remains a powerful cultural symbol, and his pioneering approach to musical composition and arrangement has played a critical role in promoting Ukrainian music on the international stage. Furthermore, N. Filipchuk's scholarly analysis in *"Ethical-Aesthetic Principles of Volodymyr Ivasiuk's Creativity"* offers a nuanced exploration of how Ivasiuk's fusion of folk lyricism with modern compositional techniques created a model for artistic synthesis that continues to inspire contemporary music and cultural studies (Filipchuk, N., p. 2, 2013).

In summary, the artistic endeavors of Volodymyr Ivasiuk and the creative output of the "Chervona Ruta" ensemble were crucial in shaping Ukrainian pop music into a culturally significant and nationally defining genre. Their legacy not only laid the groundwork for the future development of Ukrainian popular music but also facilitated the expression of a distinct national identity, which remains a salient feature of Ukraine's cultural landscape today. Through their work, Ivasiuk and "Chervona Ruta" have become central figures in the evolution of both Ukrainian musical culture and its broader socio-political context, demonstrating the profound interconnectedness between music and national identity.

2. "Chervona Ruta" as a musical and socio-cultural phenomenon.

In the modern era, the study of traditional local culture has become particularly relevant, as the process of tradition formation is shaped by the historical circumstances and social factors of a given people, their worldview, national self-awareness, everyday practices, customs, and other aspects. The exploration of local traditions is especially significant due to their capacity to stimulate processes of regeneration and renewal within traditional culture. The problem of the functioning and adaptation of traditional culture in the context of globalization holds special importance for contemporary Ukraine, as it aids in addressing the challenges of value disorientation. For instance, the study of modern forms of musical folklore in Ukrainian music can reveal mechanisms that contribute to the revival and preservation of national values. Ukrainian folklore belongs to the traditions of late formation, characterized by the intertwining of numerous cultural forms, which highlights the issue of identifying commonalities essential for establishing value-based foundations in contemporary culture (*Filipchuk, N., p. 2, 2013*). Theoretical principles concerning traditions and traditional culture, developed within the humanities, underscore an increasing recognition of the importance of such topics.

"Chervona Ruta" represents a significant musical and socio-cultural phenomenon in the context of Ukrainian popular music and cultural identity. Composed by Volodymyr Ivasiuk in 1970, the song exemplifies a synthesis of traditional Ukrainian folk elements and contemporary popular music, marking a distinctive shift in the development of Ukrainian music in the late 20th century. Its melodic structure, grounded in folk motifs, alongside its emotionally resonant lyrics, has cemented its status as a fundamental work within Ukrainian musical culture.

From a socio-cultural perspective, "Chervona Ruta" extends beyond its musical composition to become a symbol of national identity and cultural preservation, particularly in the context of Soviet-era Ukraine. The song's widespread popularity, further amplified by its inclusion in the 1971 film of the same name, directed by Roman Oleksiv, as well as its performance by prominent artists such as Sofia Rotaru, contributed to its role as a unifying cultural artifact. It resonated across generations, fostering a collective sense of pride in Ukrainian heritage and cultural distinctiveness. As a cultural product, "Chervona Ruta" reflects the resilience of Ukrainian traditions within the context of Soviet cultural policies aimed at cultural homogenization. The song not only demonstrated the creative potential of Ukrainian composers but also subtly reinforced the importance of preserving national identity through artistic expression. In contemporary scholarship, "Chervona Ruta" continues to be recognized as a pivotal work that encapsulates both artistic innovation and the enduring significance of Ukrainian music as a means of cultural self-definition.

3. Symbolism and ideology in the songs of Ivasiuk and "Chervona Ruta"

Volodymyr Ivasiuk's creative journey is marked by a profound evolution in both artistic expression and thematic exploration. His compositions, such as *Ballad About Two Violins*, exemplify his innovative approach, intertwining diverse elements of Ukrainian musical traditions to craft a unique and contemporary sound (Masliy, M., 2009). This distinctive style was further emphasized by his ability to imbue his music with deep emotional resonance, as demonstrated by his strategic use of the cimbalom to evoke a sense of Eastern Ukrainian melancholy (Dutkovskyyi, L., 2008). Ivasiuk's creative process was not merely a continuation of his innate talent but a reflection of his personal growth, as evident in works addressing mature themes such as war, political injustice, and the ephemeral nature of life (Filipchuk, N., p. 5, 2013). His dedication to his craft and his ability to remain kind-hearted despite the pressures of intellectual rigor and a demanding schedule are a testament to his character (Boichuk, T. M., 2014). His collaborations with poets like Rostyslav Bratun, with whom he shared an intuitive creative connection, resulted in poignant works such as *Song About You*, which serve as heartfelt tributes to Ukraine (Filipchuk, N., p. 2, 2013). These partnerships not only enriched Ivasiuk's musical repertoire but also contributed significantly to the broader landscape of Ukrainian musical art and culture (Filipchuk, N., p. 3, 2013).

So, Ivasiuk's influence on the music industry extended beyond innovations in individual compositions such as *Ballad About Two Violins* to the broader evolution of Ukrainian pop music. Notably, the maturation of Ivasiuk as a composer is reflected in the increasing complexity of his works over time, as evidenced by the adoption of more intricate musical structures, polyphony, and a diverse palette of expressive techniques. This progression in musical sophistication was accompanied by a shift in the lyrical content of his songs. The thematic focus of his compositions evolved from primarily socio-patriotic topics and narratives of personal life to explorations of the grandeur of nature, the intricacies of love, and reflections on the creative process itself. This paradigm shift in songwriting, characteristic of Ivasiuk's later works, helped redefine the role of the artist in the Ukrainian music scene. Furthermore, Ivasiuk's pursuit of authenticity and individuality in music, as noted by Ukrainian stage manager Dmytro Hnatyuk, allowed compositions like *Chervona Ruta* and *Vodohrai* to seamlessly integrate into Ukrainian song culture, solidifying his status as a pioneer in the industry. His works not only showcased his individuality as a composer but also set a benchmark for authenticity in Ukrainian pop music, shaping the standard for what was considered culturally significant and artistically valuable within the field (Filipchuk, N., p. 1-3, 2013).

The ballad genre holds a distinctive place in Volodymyr Ivasiuk's creative oeuvre, where the author's emotional state often takes precedence over traditional narrative style. In *The Ballad of Mallows*, lyricism intertwines with civic themes. This piece is characterized by a melodic-lyric verse, a declamatory and active refrain, a flexible vocal line with a motif that gradually expands in range before narrowing again. Following *The Tuning Fork of Good Mood*, *Chervona Ruta* gained a second life through the eponymous film directed by Roman Oleksiv. Ivasiuk's songs, such as *I Will Go to the Distant Mountains*, *Vodohrai*, and *On the Fast Trains*, serve as standout highlights of this film. The folkloric component played a pivotal role in Ivasiuk's work. "Without folk roots, I am nothing. For me, Ukrainian folklore is a textbook written by a brilliant author," he remarked. In a letter to N. Shcherbakova, Ivasiuk wrote: "Sometimes I feel like an ordinary person, but in mere moments, I am overcome by an irresistible urge to sing. On such days, I write songs. For me, they are a celebration, painting the gray prose of life with the brightest pink hues of my imagination. Only rhythms and harmonies remain with me."

So, Ivasiuk's songs defined the trajectory of Ukrainian pop music in the 1970s. They captivated audiences with their dynamic rhythms and passionate lyrical intonations, enchanting listeners with their spontaneity and improvisational character.

The genre of mass song, in which Ivasiuk excelled, typically attracted the attention of publicists and literary critics rather than musicologists. This was partly due to the mass song's entertainment function, as well as the simplicity and accessibility of its musical language. In her work *On the Heights of Pop Song*, Marishchak divides the songs of Volodymyr Ivasiuk and the *Chervona Ruta* ensemble into two categories: civic and intimate, with the latter comprising approximately four times as many compositions. Civic themes resonate in lyric-dramatic pieces such as *The Ballad of Mallows*, dedicated to those who perished in war, and *The Ballad of Victor Jara*, a tribute to the Chilean composer and singer executed under Pinochet's junta. In contrast, Ivasiuk's intimate works, which encompass themes of love, nature, and musical creativity, form a much richer and more diverse body of work. Despite being less numerous, these pieces demonstrate undeniable originality in their compositional solutions.

It is important to note, that Ivasiuk rooted his melodic and textual creativity in Ukrainian folk traditions. This is particularly evident in the dance-based refrain structure of *Vodohrai* (lyrics by Ivasiuk) and the use of a melody with two tonic pitches in a quintal relationship in *Oh, the Rose Has Blossomed* (folk lyrics). In *Dalyina* (lyrics by D. Pavlychko), elements of the dumka epic emerge, including a three-part composition, declamatory vocal intonations, and the alignment of musical phrases with semantic poetic divisions. Folkloric elements are vividly present in instrumental accompaniments, such as the Dorian mode and harmonic minor in *Dalyina* and the Hutsul mode in *Welcome* (lyrics by Ivasiuk). In songs like *I Will Go to the Distant Mountains* (lyrics by Ivasiuk) and *Invite to Dance* (lyrics by B. Stelmakh), Ivasiuk employs instrumental imitations of traditional folk instruments. In his poetic texts, Ivasiuk draws on the symbolic world of folk culture, employing parallel comparisons between natural and human phenomena, as well as folk epithets, similes, and metaphors. This includes composing music for well-known folk texts, such as *Oh, the Rose Has Blossomed*.

Ivasiuk's ability to synthesize folkloric sources with contemporary rhythms is most vividly demonstrated in *Chervona Ruta*, written in 1970. Valentina Kuzyk, in her work *Ukrainian Soviet Lyric Song*, described *Chervona Ruta* as follows: "From the perspective of compositional structure (primarily sequences), one may critique the author's professional mastery. However, no other song from the vast lyrical 'production' of our masters achieved the widespread acclaim of this piece during that period." One of the most intriguing achievements of *Chervona Ruta* lies in its composition, particularly the construction of the melodic line in the refrain. Notably, the refrain emphasizes metrically strong beats—the first beats of each measure:

*Chervona ruta,
Don't seek it in the evening—
You are my only one,
Only you, believe me*

Analyzing these accentuated notes of the vocal part reveals an original melodic "superstructure" that, if not for the tempo, could unmistakably be attributed to a dance-based genre foundation. This principle of constructing musical material aligns with Konus's theory of metro-tectonics, which distinguishes between more and less significant measures. In Ivasiuk's case, we might call this approach melodico-tectonic. Two other features of *Chervona Ruta*, which recur in Ivasiuk's other works and thus can be considered stylistic markers, deserve mention. The first pertains to the construction of vocal parts: while traditional melodic lines are based on harmonic functions at their anchor points, Ivasiuk often employs pitch intervals. This explains

his frequent use of sequences. Examples include *The Birth of Day* (lyrics by A. Dementyev), *A Song Will Be Between Us* (lyrics by Ivasiuk), *The World Without You* (lyrics by V. Babukh), and *Like Flocks of Birds* (lyrics by Ivasiuk).

The second feature is the synthesis of melody and poetic text. Ivasiuk discovered a musical equivalent for the intonation of the Ukrainian language, which blends seamlessly with pop rhythm formulas inspired by jazz—specifically, two-syllable phrase endings (emphasis on the first syllable) within a syncopated rhythm. Examples of this technique are evident in songs such as *Welcome* (lyrics by Ivasiuk) and *The Cranes Flew Away* (lyrics by V. Mykolaichuk). This technique is a key expressive tool in the introduction to *Vodohrai*. Several of Ivasiuk's works can also be classified as romances, including compositions set to the poetry of M. Tkach (*In Mid-Summer*), D. Pavlychko (*Above the Sea, Dalyina*), I. Lazarevsky (*When I Think of You*), S. Pushyk (*I Haven't Told You Everything Yet*), and B. Stelmakh (*The Cradle of the Wind*).

At times, distinguishing between song and romance genres in Ivasiuk's works is challenging, as shared traits intertwine closely. Such pieces are often referred to in musicology as "song-romances." Ivasiuk frequently retains the couplet form characteristic of songs while enhancing it with contrasting image-based episodes, resulting in two- and three-part structures, as well as employing elements of variation and through-composition, as seen in *The Late Chrysanthemum Summer*, *Winter Tale*, and *You Only Have Early Summer* (lyrics by R. Bratun) or *A Song Will Be Between Us* (lyrics by Ivasiuk).

The romance foundation of Volodymyr Ivasyuk's songs is evident in both the techniques used to develop melodic lines and, particularly, in the connection between melody and text. The forms of combining words and music vary widely. In Ivasyuk's works, these combinations are highly individual, distinctive, and almost always represent a synthesis of different principles. Notably, an active counter-rhythm often emerges (the independence of musical rhythm from poetic rhythm), which is artistically justified in each case and linked not so much to the content of individual words and phrases as to the overall meaning of the poem. A defining feature of Ivasyuk's creative style is the interplay of declamatory elements with lyrical melodies. Frequently, the beginning of a piece is composed in a recitative manner, where brief musical phrases correspond to the intonations and pauses of spoken language. Gradually, the monologue gains an impassioned character, and the melody expands into a lyrical and cantabile style, akin to an *arioso*. Examples of this include *Dalyina* (lyrics by D. Pavlychko), *Pisnya pro tebe* (*Song About You*), *V tebe tilky rannye lito* (*You Only Have an Early Summer*), *Lito piznikh zhorzhyn* (*The Late Summer of Dahlias*) (lyrics by R. Bratunya), *Zaprosy mene u sny* (*Invite Me Into Your Dreams*), *Nestrymna techiya* (*Unrestrained Current*) (lyrics by B. Stelmakh), and *Ya-tvoye krylo* (*I Am Your Wing*) (lyrics by R. Kudlyk), as well as *Ya shche ne vse tobi skazav* (*I Haven't Said Everything to You Yet*) (lyrics by S. Pushyk).

It can be confidently asserted that these stylistic innovations represent a significant contribution by composer Volodymyr Ivasyuk and the ensemble *Chervona Ruta* to the development of Ukrainian popular music in the 1970s.

4. Conclusions

Volodymyr Ivasyuk and the ensemble "Chervona Ruta" significantly influenced the evolution of Ukrainian popular music, skillfully merging national identity with contemporary musical trends. Ivasyuk's innovative compositions, including "Chervona Ruta" and "Vodohrai", achieved remarkable popularity and became enduring symbols of Ukrainian culture. These works fused traditional folk motifs with modern musical expressions while maintaining their

deep cultural resonance. The ensemble "Chervona Ruta" played a key role in advancing Ivasyuk's creative vision, elevating the art of performance to a new level. Their artistry was characterized by a seamless blend of vocal and instrumental elements, as well as their capacity to connect emotionally with listeners. Together, Ivasyuk and "Chervona Ruta" established a foundation for the professionalization of Ukrainian popular music. Their contributions were instrumental in preserving Ukrainian cultural identity during the Soviet period and paved the way for the renaissance of national music in the years leading to independence. Their legacy remains a cornerstone of Ukraine's cultural history.

References

1. Boichuk, T. M., etc. (2014). *Vypusknkyiv tvoikh slavetni imena*. Chernivtsi: Misto. [In Ukrainian].
2. Dutkovskyy, L. (2008). *Yakby nas ne rozbyly poodyntsi: mene, Nazariia Yaremchuka i Vasyliia Zinkevycha – my zrobyly b nabahato bilshhe*. *Vseukrainskyi zhurnal «SVOIA MUZYKA»*, (1), 2. Retrieved from <http://filarmoniya.cv.ua/ua/paper3/> (Accessed December 18, 2024) [In Ukrainian].
3. Filipchuk, N. (2013). *Etyko-estetychni zasady tvorchoosti Volodymyra Ivasiuka*. *Mystetstvo ta osvita*, (3), 2–5. (Accessed December 18, 2024) [In Ukrainian].
4. Ivasiuk, H., Ivasiuk, O., & Krysa, L. (2011). *Vidlunnia tvoikh krokiv*. Volodymyr Ivasiuk. Lviv: Vydavnychiy dim «UkrPol». [In Ukrainian].
5. Masliy, M. (2009). *Storinky pamiaty Volodymyra Ivasiuka*. *Svoboda*, (18, 19). Retrieved from http://www.ivasjuk.org.ua/articles.php?lang=uk&id=ivasjuk_kozhen_tvir_porodzhyye_bolisno_solodkyj_drozh (Accessed December 18, 2024) [In Ukrainian].
6. Masliy, M. (2014, March 3). *My, ukraintsi, z kolysky staiemo natsionalistamy, yakshcho materi spivaiut nam ukrainski kolyskovi. Tomu nas perevykhovuiut u kontstaborakh*. *Vysokyi Zamok*. Retrieved December 18, 2024, from <https://wz.lviv.ua/far-and-near/126053-mi-ukrajintsi-z-koliski-staemo-natsionalistami-yakshcho-materi-spivayut-nam-ukrajins-ki-koliskovi-tomu-nas-perevikhovuyut-u-kontstaborakh> [In Ukrainian].
7. Plakhta, D. (2019, January 20). *Pravila Zhyttia vydatnykh lvivian*. Volodymyr Ivasiuk: veb sait. Retrieved from <https://boomplus.tv/2019/01/20/pravy-la-zhyttia-vydatnykh-lvivian-volod/> (Accessed December 18, 2024) [In Ukrainian].
8. *Top-5 tsikavykh faktiv z zhyttia lehendarnoho ukrainskoho poeta i kompozytora Volodymyra Ivasiuka*. Retrieved from <https://amazing-ukraine.com/top-5-tsikavykh-faktiv-z-zhyttia-lehendarnoho-ukrainskoho-poeta-i-kompozytora-volodymyraivasuka/> (Accessed December 18, 2024) [In Ukrainian].