

**КУЛЬТУРОЛОГІЧНІ РОЗВІДКИ**

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**UKRAINIAN TRADITIONAL CIRCUS IN TODAY'S  
REALITY: BETWEEN FORMATION  
AND ABASEMENT**

**Abstract:** The article is dedicated to modern Ukrainian circus art. Ukraine has a very powerful circus school, represented by highly professional specialists in all the leading genres of circus art. The problem of the traditional circus's existence is actualized in the face of the challenges of modern society. The fact that a traditional circus is possible only if it contains the animal training genre is emphasized, i.e. use of animals in circus shows. The importance of analyzing the issue solely on the example of state stationary circuses (Ukraine has seven such organizations today) is emphasized, i.e. on the example of circus institutions that own buildings and conditions for animals standing, providing them with the necessary veterinary care, feeding and the necessary regime of keeping. The main challenges of our time are given that threaten the existence of animal training as a genre of circus art: COVID-2019, which made circus performances almost impossible as an element of mass entertainment events due to quarantine restrictions, the Russian-Ukrainian war, which destroys, among

other things, the circus industry, the bill about the prohibition of the use of animals in circuses, which threatens the existence of the traditional circus as a whole. The debatable nature of the problem is emphasized, the presence of moral, ethical, legal and economic components of the issue is emphasized. Circus art nowadays can rightfully be considered one of the most advantageous components of the system of performing arts in Ukraine, despite the fact that it has quite a lot of controversial, debatable aspects. Even the classification of this phenomenon has always caused difficulties: whether to consider the circus a sport or an art, what is its place in the system of arts, whether to recognize circus science as an independent field of knowledge.

**Key words:** performing arts, circus art, traditional circus, animal training, circus show.

**Introduction.** Since 1991, Ukraine has actually rewritten the circus art's history. Since before the collapse of the USSR, the Ukrainian circus was a segment of the general concept of "Soviet circus", after 1991, i.e. after the formation of Ukraine as an independent state, the country found itself in a situation where the circus was almost completely cut off from the main material resources, a significant part of which was concentrated on the territory of today's Russia, and a important part of the programs, shows, in which artists from various territorial zones were involved, became impossible, so the circus had to start all over again, both conceptually and technically. Ukraine has a very powerful circus school, represented by highly professional specialists in all the leading genres of circus art. It is thanks to the potential of its artists that the Ukrainian circus has one of the main places in the circus space of the whole world even today, despite all the difficulties. At the same time, it is this segment of the cultural field of the state that is in an extremely

dangerous state these days – too many challenges are thrown in its face by the reality of nowadays.

**Problem statement.** To date, Ukraine has a fairly branched structure of the “circus world”, including both stationary circuses, and mobile ones, chapiteau, “circus towns”, both private and state-owned. And, unfortunately, the problems associated with the circus industry can be tracked and controlled in state structures only, so, under the control of the state. Organizations that control the main processes taking place in the circus sphere of the country closely cooperate with each other: the State Enterprise “Directorate of Traveling Circus Groups of Ukraine” (which includes 8 artistic groups), the State Circus Company of Ukraine, all stationary circuses. There are nine state circus enterprises in Ukraine today, and today the country has seven stationary circuses that have at their disposal their own areas, buildings, conditions necessary to provide the team with everything necessary. Until recently, there were more of them, but the Luhansk, Donetsk, Simferopol circuses today are cut off from the Ukrainian circus life, and the Yalta circus ceased to exist in 2014. Therefore, today the National Circus of Ukraine (Kyiv), the Dnipro State Circus, the Zaporizhzhya State circus, Lviv State Circus, Kryvyi Rih State Circus, Kharkiv State Circus, Odesa State Circus are all stationary circuses, which are rightfully called traditional.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Soviet humanities had researched the circus as early as in the middle of the 20th century, but circus science as a separate science can be traced back to the 1980s. Among its founders as an independent sector of art history was Yu. Nikulin, Dmitriev, the author of the most significant works in the field of the Soviet circus. Important contribution to the development of circus science was made by V. Barinov, V. Belokhvostova, Yu. Nikulin, Yu. Blagov, O. Klepatskaya, E. Kuznetsov, S. Makarov, V. Savina, R.

Slavsky, N. Hrenov, I. Chernenko, and others. The theoretical studies of the circus masters (tamers, directors, clowns), who left an array of valuable memories, are important and interesting too, methodological recommendations, historical notes that are invaluable for the history and theory of the circus (I. Bugrimova, Yu. Nikulin, O. Popov), since this data was obtained from the original source, no theorist will give what the practitioner can give. However, some of these researchers are already purely chronologically positioned as Russian scientists, and although the subject of their research is mainly the Soviet circus and its masters, since 1991 the Russian vector of circus studies has been considered separately from the Ukrainian one for historical and political reasons. Therefore, Ukrainian circus science, having the same works of Yu. Dmitriev in its origins, since 1991 has an independent history. The science of circus in Ukraine is still very young, it is just passing through the stage of formation, and the subject of study is processes that can be conditionally divided into history and modernity: the first is the history of the Soviet circus, which is rightfully considered part of the Ukrainian heritage, and the second is all in the circus space over the past thirty years.

Circus theorists are not only cultural scientists, art historians, but also practicing circus artists and directors. In recent years, there have written more and more works dedicated to the theory and history of circus art, different genres, schools, the training of circus artists and the place of circus art in modern education, both some articles in scientific periodicals: G. Kurinna [2], M. Malykhina [3], Yu. Romanenkova [7-9; 14], O. Pozharska [4-6], S. Shumakova [11-13] and larger-scale works [1], including dissertations, dedicated to various aspects of the circus phenomenon [3; 6].

But if theorists mainly create works on global issues in the field of psychology, pedagogy, cultural studies, circus

history [10], then authors-artists more often either become authors of methodological developments, practical recommendations on the technique of performing certain tricks, directing programs, constructing of circus shows, features of props, stage costume, etc., make-up, safety in the work of a circus artist (works by T. Grinier, I. Lvova, D. Orel, Yu. Sobolev). Memoirs is a not less interesting genre of their research work. Memories of the circus world, written by its participants and creators, is an invaluable source of information, such as the texts of the world-famous predator trainer L. Shevchenko.

The main **purpose of this article** is analyze a circus under quarantine restrictions due to COVID-2019, circus in the reality of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022, a risk of destruction of the traditional circus due to the law on the prohibition of the use of animals in spectacular events.

**Presentation of the main research material.** For the circus to be considered traditional, animal training must be present among the genres, i.e. animals must be used in the circus. In all stationary circuses of Ukraine today there are programs, shows using animals, predator training has always been among the most popular genres in the circus. The main consumer of these shows was usually the children's audience, although they are in demand among all age categories. But it's animal training that has recently become one of the most serious stumbling blocks, which is associated with a number of problems that lie in the plane of ethics and morality. The Ukrainian circus can be called classic: in its history there are many programs that have shown animals as the dominant. Among them there are those that have no analogues in the history of the world circus: so far not a single animal trainer in the world has been able to repeat them. But it was training that became the genre that today is on the verge of extinction.

The circus as a performing art is very dependent on the direct contact of artists with the public, with the spectator. Therefore, the challenges of the last two years are disastrous for it, the circus was in danger more than any other art form. One of the most stressful aspects for the circus industry has been the pandemic, COVID-19 has very serious consequences for the arts in general and for the circus in particular. Performing arts, needed for the presence of a large number of people, where extremely important, if not decisive, is direct contact with the spectator, emotional unity, the exchange of energy flashes that occurs between the artist and the public. Quarantine restrictions have made it impossible, and the circus is not the kind of show where it's possible to replace a "live" performance with an on-line format. At first, there was a lack of contact with the public, when a ban was announced on organizing and visiting of mass events, and then there were problems with the rehearsal process: artists could not get to rehearsal facilities, difficulties appeared with props and costumes, since the mobility of employees in all areas was limited.

Animal training experienced particular difficulties and serious problems: keeping animals in circuses is associated with a number of specific aspects, some of which, under the restrictions imposed due to COVID, become a critical danger. In addition to the need to maintain animals in proper condition, provide them with mandatory veterinary care, feeding according to a specially created system, they need strict adherence to the regime, the main component of which is motion. Without it circus animals are at risk of serious health problems, many of which may be irreversible. In a especially difficult situation are horses that need daily training, regardless of the presence or absence of external factors that may prevent this. Perhaps, for the first time since the collapse of the USSR, when we had to

actually start writing our history from the beginning, the circus was in serious danger.

But the most difficult test, of course, was the war that began on February 24, 2022. When guns speak, the muses are silent. Events today put the traditional circus on the brink of survival - a universal disaster makes it almost impossible: while people are dying around and the country is on fire, artistic events will wait, and artists will do everything for the speedy onset of victory and peace. The Ukrainian circus community found itself in a crisis: of course, it cannot be called unprecedented, since the circus was already tested by war, together with the whole country, in 1941-45, when events showed what the circus brotherhood is capable of in wartime reality. Many artists join the territorial defense, go to the front line, some of them who could not take up arms became volunteers, but at the same time circus artists-animals are not left unattended: even on the hottest days they are provided with proper care, people devoted to animals as part of the circus team, watch to ensure that feed is delivered on time and the animals are safe and do not starve. In those days of the war, when many private menageries, zoos, ecoparks found themselves in a terrible situation due to shelling, bombing, blockade, the animals became the most unprotected. The Mykolayiv zoo, the Kharkiv zoo, even the Kyiv zoo, having national importance, appealed for help in the rescue of animals – the cry for the rescue of the Mykolayiv animals sounded one of the first: the menagerie was saved by joint efforts. The capital zoo is holding on, but it is also being helped by everyone who can, from foreign sponsors to ordinary Kyivites who buy electronic tickets to a closed zoo to transfer at least a little money for animal feed in this way.

The Yasnogorodka family ecopark found itself in a difficult situation, where employees face problems in the delivery of animal feed.

The situation of the unique park “12 months” in the Kyiv region became catastrophic, which was blocked for the supply of feed and fuel for heating the territory, which provoked the danger of death of animals that began to slowly die from hunger and cold.

The famous “Feldman Ecopark” in the Kharkiv region was in such a dire situation that in the first days of April 2022, information about the impending tragedy was heard: due to the inability to save the predators, they must be euthanized. The animals of the park die during shelling, die from stress, the catastrophe has no boundaries... But already on April 5, in the evening of the same day, when information was announced about the planned euthanasia of tigers, bears and lions in the Olexander Feldman ecopark, a solution was found – the Dnipro offered help, the Poltava region joined in, volunteers and animal rights activists raised all concerned to their feet, and a decision was made to evacuate the predators, the main part immediately received rescue at Natalia Popova's Wild Animal Shelter in the Kyiv region.

Circus collectives also continue to protect their animals from death by all available ways, often even at the risk of their own life. Since the end of February 2022, the National Circus of Ukraine, famous for its classical programs with the participation of animals, has found itself in one of the hottest spots in Ukraine: Kyiv has been subjected to rocket attacks, shelling, fierce battles have been going on the outskirts of the capital, and air raid sirens sound daily. But people for whom animals are not props of shows, but pets and almost family members, risk their own safety in order to provide circus animals with food and care. The circus does not function; in wartime conditions, all kinds of opportunities for the continuation of the work of animals are automatically terminated. But for them it is tantamount to death. Many members of the circus team, who did not leave the country

and remain in the capital, despite the danger, continue to take care of the animals, staying constantly next to them, delivering food and everything necessary to the circus building, sometimes at the risk of their lives, since the Kyiv region is constantly under shelling and often subjected to air strikes.

Financial help, help in the purchase of food for the circuses, especially the capital one, is also provided by foreign partners, of which the Ukrainian circus community has a lot. Hungary, Czech Republic, Germany, Monaco, France, Canada have always been among the friends and partners of Ukrainian circus groups, joint programs, cooperation of various types were constant. And in the days of the Russian-Ukrainian war, these partnerships passed the most reliable test of strength. Many circus organizations invited Ukrainian circus performers to their countries, offering work and shelter from the horrors of hostilities, many gave students the opportunity to live and work, including the Circus and Performing Arts Academy of the capital, which trains future circus artists and has the most powerful circus school in the country: almost 30 students and a professor cooperate with the Prague “Cirk La Putyka” (Czech Republic), the same number of representatives of the circus youth fraternity continue training in Budapest (Hungary) together with Kharkiv colleagues; about 60 circus students got the opportunity not to lose their professional skills and work together with “Zirkus macht stark” (Berlin, Germany). The Budapest Circus, with which the Kyiv circus community has long and close creative ties, provides very tangible assistance in ensuring that the circus animals of the Ukrainian capital do not experience problems with feed. The circus takes care of animals in any situation, this relationship is tested even by the disasters of wartime.

But, besides the horror that Ukraine is suffering from today, besides the pandemic that preceded these terrible days,

there is, unfortunately, another problem that puts the traditional circus on the brink of extinction. This is a ban on the use of animals in circuses – both predator and domestic. Animal training has always been the genre that at all times has been more severely debated regarding ethics and morality. Animal rights activists do not get tired of crying out about the cruel treatment of animals in the circus. Unfortunately, in private menageries, or perhaps certain mobile, unlicensed and non-government-controlled zoos, cases of mistreatment or mismanagement of animals are difficult to control, of course, this is not even worth discussing – such phenomena must be destroyed in the cultural space, they should become impossible by law. But we can't mix everything, we'll have as a result an unprofessional approach to lawmaking without in-depth knowledge of the problem: these are the consequences that the adoption without adjustment of the bill banning the use of animals in entertainment events, including circuses, initiated in 2021 in Ukraine, can have (p. No. 5406). The old global problem of the unnatural existence of an animal in captivity and its use in a circus lies on a completely different plane than it now seems as a result of the discussion around this bill. Perhaps, despite the thousand-year history of the communication of man and animal, the long history of circus art, the obvious benefits of having training in the circus and the educational role of this genre, it is difficult to deny the complexity of the moral point of view of the problem: yes, an animal should not exist in captivity, should not be a visual aid, a subject of study or a toy for children. And, from the point of view of ethics, morality is impossible to justify the use of an animal in science for experiments or in zoos and circuses for entertainment or profit. It shouldn't be like that. But: PRIMARY should not. But this has been going on for thousands of years. Of course, it is impossible and immoral to justify cruelty to animals with profit, benefit. But it will simply not be possible to

solve the age-old problem by the method proposed now by legislative means. Such a decision could lead to disastrous consequences. First of all, we cannot justify the use of animals in illegal entertainment events, this is unacceptable and should not just be banned, but with severe consequences for violating the ban. But the circus (let us note that we are talking about *state* institutions – *stationary* circuses that have their own premises, and there are currently seven such circuses in Ukraine that have animals on their balance sheet) is not an illegal spectacle with the use of animals. It is important to emphasize that only the situation with stationary circuses can be discussed, which have all the necessary conditions for keeping animals, providing them with the necessary care in terms of feeding, veterinary support and appropriate regimen. It looks very noble to call for the release of all animal trainers from cruel treatment and to forbid them to be tortured to the delight of the executioners-spectators. But even if we hear this call and agree with the impossibility of using animals in the future (and such a circus type without animals is practiced in some countries around the world, following the example of Canada or Germany), so, what to do with circuses animals *NOW*? It is easiest to boast of the humanity of the appeal without calculating the consequences. Handing out animals to rehabilitation centers is the most popular proposition. We do not even remember the fact that a whole team, a large part of the circus community, and not only artists associated with training, with the creation and keeping up shows with animals, will lose a job. For the sake of a generous goal, we can not be mercantile. But what is the fate of those animals that are *now* a segment of the circus life? They were born in this space, they were not placed in a circus captivity from nature, were not caught in a free forest and were not placed in a cramped cage to yearn.

The vast majority of circus animals know nothing about other conditions of existence, they *were born already* in the circus or have been here since childhood. Contrary to the loud cries of animal rights activists, who often exploit the sensitivity of spectators, animals in Ukrainian circuses are in conditions strictly regulated by requirements, from the number of meters of territory to a clear regimen, the number of feedings per day, a specific diet, and medical support. No rehabilitation center will be able to reproduce the proper conditions for animals brought up in a certain atmosphere, which must meet a number of criteria, not to mention the legal aspects of the problem. And most importantly – how will they be able to provide animals with the necessary regimen, in addition to care and feeding? It is not enough just to keep a horse in a spacious environment and feed in a certain way – he must move, receive certain care in accordance with the usual training regimen, otherwise the animal will die. It will not be able to change the life rhythm without critical consequences. We may agree – yes, there is no place for an animal in a circus, it is not worth the performance that the animal will be in unnatural conditions for itself. Everyone decides for himself whether or not to be a traditional circus, that is, a circus with animals. But this is a question of the future type of the circus. Such a decision should be balanced, and if agreed upon, it should have a delayed, gradual effect that would not harm the animals that *currently* exist in the circus. And, even more so, one should distinguish between a ban on the use of animals in the circus in general and an indication of their use as a reason for their cruel treatment. These are two absolutely different problem aspects, and one cannot speculate on the substitution of concepts. Of course, as in any matter, cases of dishonest behavior, cruelty of training methods for the sake of the result can be stated, which led to speculation on the subject. And such people should be deprived of the right to

approach the arena and work with animals. But these are rather special cases that gave rise to a stereotype. Mostly Ukrainian circus artists use humane training methods. This is how the legendary, world-famous predator trainers Volodymyr and Lyudmyla Shevchenko explained their success. It is they who have the unique tricks with predators, which have no analogues in the circus world so far, like the tango with the lioness of Lyudmyla Shevchenko. Unlike many European circuses, where both electric shock and castration of animals are practiced so that they do not pose a danger to the trainer, Ukrainian animal trainers try to focus more on the work of a person of trainer, actor, using animals as helpers, focusing on their exterior beauty, grace, it sometimes even detrimental to the showmanship of the performance, but at the same time, the training is humane, and the trainer finds methods of subduing the beast without injuring or intimidating him. The skill and humanity of predator training have always been the hallmark of the famous dynasty of trainers Shevchenko. People who work with animals, care for them, are really devoted to their job.

**Conclusions.** By exceptions to the rules, it is impossible to form an opinion about the phenomenon as a whole. After all, society does not prohibit a car as a means of transportation as a result of the presence of monstrous accidents due to drunk drivers, arranging races and enjoying it as a sport. Of course, the animal does not have the right to choose whether to participate in the show, it is doomed to it, having got into the circus. But once more, the moral point of view of the problem has a “delayed effect” – whether there will be a traditional circus in general, but this is not a question of the fate of the circus animals, who ARE NOW in the circus. Therefore, probably, whether there should be a traditional circus with animals is a very debatable issue, which is primarily in the moral sphere. For the sake of humanity, one can sacrifice benefits and traditions by

admiring an animal in its natural conditions of existence, but not in a circus or a zoo. But it is impossible to make a decision at once that will lead not only to the destruction of the cultural layer, but also to the inevitable physical death of a considerable number of animals, if the ban on the use of animals in the circus is adopted applicable to animals NOW AND IMMEDIATELY. It must be remembered that “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” and the beast must not be the victim not only of a selfish love of entertainment, but also of an unbalanced decision to suddenly give it up.

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### **УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ТРАДИЦІЙНИЙ ЦИРК: МІЖ СТАНОВЛЕННЯМ І ЗНИЩЕННЯМ**

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена сучасному українському цирковому мистецтву. Актуалізується проблема існування традиційного цирку в умовах викликів сучасного суспільства. Наголошується на тому, що традиційний цирк можливий лише за умови наявності в ньому жанру дресури, тобто використання тварин у циркових номерах. Наголошено на важливості аналізу питання виключно на прикладі державних стаціонарних цирків, яких сьогодні в Україні сім, а саме на прикладі циркових інституцій, що мають у власності будівлі та умови для знаходження тварин, забезпечення їх необхідним ветеринарним обслуговуванням, годуванням та потрібним режимом утримання. Наводяться основні виклики

сучасності, які ставлять під загрозу існування дресури як жанру циркового мистецтва: COVID-2019, який унеможливив циркові уявлення як елемент масових видовищних заходів у зв'язку з карантинними обмеженнями, російсько-українська війна, що знищує серед іншого і циркову галузь, законопроект про заборону використання тварин у цирках, що ставить під загрозу існування традиційного цирку загалом. Акцентується дискусійний характер проблеми, наголошується на наявності моральної етичної, юридичної економічної складових питання.

**Ключові слова:** сценічне мистецтво, циркове мистецтво, традиційний цирк, дресура тварин, циркове шоу.

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