

КУЛЬТУРОЛОГІЧНІ РОЗВІДКИ

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**CREATIVE ACTIVITIES OF CIRCUSES IN THE
EASTERN AND WESTERN REGIONS OF UKRAINE IN
WARTIME: BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH CIRCUS
DIRECTORS.**

Abstract. This article marks the inaugural chapter of a comprehensive research initiative, delving into the experiences of circus directors in Ukraine amidst challenging times. It presents interviews with two distinguished directors hailing from Lviv and Kharkiv. The narratives offered by these circus visionaries illuminate the profound impact of war and adversity on the circus industry in Ukraine. This article is the opening instalment of a larger exploration that seeks to engage with circus directors across the nation, unravelling the unique stories

of these cultural bastions and the resilience they embody. Throughout this series, we will explore the multifaceted impacts of the war on Ukraine's circus community. We will delve into the directors' personal experiences, hearing their stories of triumphs and tribulations, and gain insight into the coping mechanisms that have allowed them to continue pursuing their passion for entertaining audiences, even in times of crisis.

Moreover, we will shed light on the pressing needs of the Ukrainian circus today. Beyond the applause and standing ovations, these institutions are grappling with their own set of challenges. The circus, a timeless form of entertainment, has evolved to adapt to the changing world, but now faces a crisis of a different kind – one that requires support, understanding, and recognition of its cultural significance.

Join us on this enlightening research through the Ukrainian circus, where the magic under the big top has not dimmed, but rather, has illuminated the path of resilience and hope in the face of adversity. These circus directors' stories are a testament to the power of art, passion, and community in the most trying of times, offering us a glimpse into a world where the show must go on, no matter the circumstances.

Key words: circus, Ukraine, Lviv circus, Kharkiv circus, cultural heritage, cultural exchange, creativity, Post-War Recovery.

Introduction. This article marks the inaugural chapter of a comprehensive research initiative, delving into the experiences of circus directors in Ukraine amidst challenging times. It presents interviews with two distinguished directors hailing from Lviv and Kharkiv. The narratives offered by these circus visionaries illuminate the profound impact of war and adversity on the circus industry in Ukraine.

Problem statement. This article is the opening instalment of a larger exploration that seeks to engage with circus directors across the nation, unravelling the unique stories of these cultural bastions and the resilience they embody. Throughout this series, we will explore the multifaceted impacts of the war on Ukraine's circus community. We will delve into the directors' personal experiences, hearing their stories of triumphs and tribulations, and gain insight into the coping mechanisms that have allowed them to continue pursuing their passion for entertaining audiences, even in times of crisis.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The article on circuses in Lviv and Kharkiv draws from diverse literature, including interviews with directors, contemporary sources like DUA and Zaxid.net, and theoretical works on socio-cultural design. Historical books contribute context, while circus websites provide direct information. This multi-faceted approach creates a comprehensive analysis, blending primary insights, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary perspectives. The result is a well-rounded exploration of the cultural, artistic, and historical dimensions of these circuses, showcasing their evolution and adaptation in the face of modern challenges.

The purpose of this article. We will shed light on the pressing needs of the Ukrainian circus today. Beyond the applause and standing ovations, these institutions are grappling with their own set of challenges

Presentation of the main research material. One of Lviv's most cherished locales with deep historical roots from the last century is the Lviv State Circus. In 1969, the brilliant architects Adolf Bakhmatov and Mykhailo Kanevskyi joined forces to create a truly unique structure that would become the haven of circus art. Nestled at the base of Svyatoyura mountain, this architectural gem owes its enchanting landscaping and

interiors to the talented Vasyl Kamenshchik [5]. From the exterior, Lviv's circus presents itself as a flattened disc, but as visitors step inside, an entirely different world unfolds before their eyes. The spacious interior, complemented by expansive windows, imparts a sense of coziness and the city's radiant warmth. To reinforce this impression, a vibrant yellow arena, resembling a radiant sun from above, graces the very heart of the hall [9].

The circus takes the form of a domed, cylindrical structure, with facilities for performers' dressing rooms and leisure areas encircling its perimeter. The grand entrance area, featuring an exquisitely adorned auditorium and a central arena under the dome, encircled by amphitheater-style seating for the audience, is particularly noteworthy.

Spanning over 100 square meters, the Lviv Circus accommodates an audience of 1,758, offering a truly grand spectacle for its visitors.

Throughout its storied history, the Lviv Circus's arena has welcomed esteemed guests from the USA, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Italy, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and numerous other countries.

The world of the circus, a realm of enchantment and wonder, has not been immune to the trials and tribulations of recent years. We had the privilege of talking with Roman Zdrenyk, the Director of the Lviv State Circus, to delve into the profound impacts that the confluence of COVID-19 and the ongoing war has had on this cherished art form.

As Roman explains, the circus community faced its first blow with the onset of the global pandemic. The lockdowns and restrictions meant that many circuses and circus companies were unable to perform, leaving artists grappling with uncertainty. Some, in the absence of audiences and stages, found themselves embarking on entirely different career paths – jugglers

transformed into truck drivers, acrobats reimagining their lives in new roles.

And then came the war. For circus enthusiasts and practitioners alike, it was a heart-wrenching moment when the applause fell silent. Performances came to an abrupt halt, and the circus, like many other sectors, faced economic hardships. Roman emphasizes that while they didn't let go of any of their dedicated employees, adjusting salaries became an inevitable necessity as the circus lost its primary source of income.

Yet, amidst these challenges, the Lviv State Circus emerged as an unexpected beacon of hope and unity. As Roman recounts, they swiftly transformed into an improvised hub for assistance [7]. Calls poured in from near and far – colleagues and former artists from Hungary, Czechia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, Germany, and the United States, all eager to lend a helping hand. However, as Roman notes, accepting this overwhelming support posed a different set of challenges. It was a testament to the global circus community's solidarity.

The Lviv State Circus did not hesitate to reciprocate this goodwill. They played a vital role in the evacuation of the circus show "Circus on the Water," which had its base in Kharkiv. In a remarkable display of solidarity, they transported artists, animals, and equipment to the safety of their own circus grounds.

Additionally, the circus opened its doors to artists from across Ukraine who sought refuge in these tumultuous times. Roman's team provided them with shelter and support.

Roman reserves special praise for the director of the Capital Circus of Budapest, Peter Fekete, and the European Circus Association and personally Mr. Urs Pilz and Kristian Kristof. Their collaborative efforts ensured the delivery of essential food supplies for the animals, which the Lviv State

Circus diligently distributed among other circuses and private artists who rely on these provisions for their animal companions. Roman Zdrenyk's story is a poignant testament to the resilience and unwavering spirit of the circus community. In the face of adversity, the Lviv State Circus, has not only weathered the storm but also extended a helping hand to fellow artists and colleagues in their time of need. It is a reminder that even during the darkest of times, the magic of the circus endures, and its people stand strong together under the big top.

As Roman Zdrenyk, Director of the Lviv State Circus, reflects on the tumultuous events of recent years, he takes us back to a time when war was still a distant rumour, whispered in hushed tones. Those discussions were merely conjecture, something he, like many others, could scarcely envision becoming reality. The circus, like most, was unprepared for the seismic shifts that lay ahead. When the war finally did erupt, it was nothing short of a profound shock, shattering the peace they had known.

Roman recounts his disbelief that a massive nation could launch an attack against a smaller neighbour. It was a surreal and unsettling realization. In the initial throes of the conflict, their first course of action was to sever all possible ties and collaborations with the aggressor country. It marked a significant departure from the days when they engaged in joint projects, hosting Russian shows in their circus.

Roman personally penned 35 letters to his former Russian colleagues, earnestly sharing his perspective on the war in Ukraine. The responses, or the lack thereof, painted a stark picture. Only two of them acknowledged the gravity of the situation, with simple statements like "yes, the war is very bad" and "We all have our own truth". The majority, however, chose to remain silent, a deafening silence that left Roman deeply disheartened. These were individuals who had once performed

in Lviv, experiencing the beauty of the city first-hand, and now, they seemed worlds apart.

It was a stark revelation for Roman that the pursuit of dialogue had its limits. With a heavy heart, they made the decision to halt all collaborations with Russia and Belarus. Roman admits to some regret regarding Belarus, believing that the people there did not necessarily support their leader's actions, particularly given the political challenges they faced.

Roman Zdrenyk's journey through these trying times serves as a poignant reminder of the impact of war not only on nations but on personal connections and collaborations. The shockwaves of conflict reverberate far and wide, leaving lasting imprints on the hearts and choices of individuals, even within the world of circus, where the pursuit of art often transcends boundaries.

In the wake of the initial shock caused by the eruption of war, Roman Zdrenyk, Director of the Lviv State Circus, swiftly recognized that adaptation was the key to survival in this challenging new reality. However, the road ahead would prove to be one of self-reliance and determination, as the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine offered limited support and guidance.

With the weight of their institution's future resting on their shoulders, circus directors were left to make crucial decisions independently. Their foremost concern was ensuring the safety of their employees while maintaining a semblance of financial stability. It was in this spirit of self-preservation that they resolved to continue their work, fully aware that the survival of their institution depended on it.

A pivotal realization emerged: to continue their operations safely, they needed a shelter for their cherished audience. The search for a suitable space led them to an unexpected solution – an underground area that had remained unused and closed for four decades. The very thought of descending into this

subterranean space filled them with trepidation, but the dire circumstances left them with little choice.

Undeterred, a united team of circus artists and employees embarked on a monumental clean-up effort. Enormous trucks were brought in to haul away decades of accumulated debris, clearing the path for their ambitious project. Repair work commenced, encompassing everything from restoring electricity connections to rehabilitating the long-neglected stairs leading to the underground shelter. Remarkably, every aspect of this transformation was achieved through their collective efforts, and they even crafted 70 branches from recycled materials.

Their perseverance bore fruit – a shelter capable of accommodating 835 people emerged from the depths of the underground. This feat was a testament to the indomitable spirit of the circus community, their determination to adapt and thrive under trying circumstances.

Their initiative did not go unnoticed. A special commission was convened, granting the Lviv State Circus the authorization to reopen and welcome audiences numbering up to 735 people. With this green light, they resumed their circus shows, marking a triumphant return to their artistic endeavors. Remarkably, the underground shelter now serves a dual purpose, extending beyond circus performances. It provides a haven for those living nearby in case of alarms or emergencies, solidifying the circus's role as not just an entertainment venue but a refuge in times of need.

The Lviv State Circus's journey is a shining example of resilience, resourcefulness, and unwavering determination. In the face of adversity, they not only adapted to the new reality but also transformed it, breathing new life into a space long forgotten. Their story is a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit and the boundless possibilities that arise when a community unites in pursuit of a shared dream.

As the Lviv State Circus obtained the necessary permissions to resume its operations, a fresh challenge emerged – one that revolved around the scarcity of talent. Many artists had left Ukraine, leaving behind a void that needed filling. While the presence of Ukrainian artists abroad was a source of pride, it also underscored the urgent need for talent within the country.

The programs presented in the arena sought to strike an optimistic and positive chord. It was a conscious decision born from the understanding that the audience was weary from the ongoing war. Roman Zdrenyk, the Director, noted that while the shadow of conflict loomed, there was no need to incessantly remind people of it. Instead, their mission became clear: to bring joy and happiness to a tired populace.

In this spirit of resilience, the Lviv State Circus embarked on a new venture – a show entitled “Circus on Ice” with the poignant name “We are from Ukraine”. This remarkable production was slated to open on September 23, 2023, and would subsequently travel to France. The decision to launch a new season during wartime exemplified the circus's unwavering commitment to its art and its audience.

Speaking about the financial situation, Roman emphasized the importance of stability and prosperity in the cultural sector. While challenges persisted, the circus remained steadfast in its mission to keep ticket prices accessible. They firmly believed that culture should not be a luxury but an opportunity available to all. In this way, they aimed to ensure that the wonder and enchantment of the circus could be experienced by everyone, regardless of their economic circumstances.

The Lviv State Circus's story is a testament to adaptability, optimism, and a commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of those they entertain. In the face of adversity, they continue to shine as a beacon of hope, reminding

In these times of uncertainty, the Lviv State Circus has remained steadfast in its commitment to fostering relationships with circuses worldwide. While the landscape has changed, the circus continues to navigate the challenges with resilience and a dedication to the art that unites them.

Roman Zdrenyk, the Director of the Lviv State Circus, acknowledges that planning events has become more intricate compared to the pre-war era. However, their enduring relationships with circuses across borders, both near and far, have remained a source of inspiration and optimism. The Lviv State Circus shares a particularly strong bond with the Lviv National Opera, exemplifying the harmonious coexistence of diverse artistic forms within their city.

Despite the ongoing conflict, the circus has refused to let its spirit wane. This past summer, they collaborated on an international project with German partners, including Montelino Circus and Mobile Circus for Peace, alongside the Kyiv Municipal Academy of Circus and Performing Arts and the Charitable Foundation for the Development of Ukrainian Art [2]. This joint endeavor illuminated the circus with inspiration and optimism, a testament to the enduring power of art to transcend borders and bring people together.

Looking ahead, the circus is already planning for the winter season – a festival called “Bright Arena of Lviv” featuring a competition among young artists from circus children's studios. Roman Zdrenyk expresses hope that peace will soon prevail, leading to a resurgence of European artists performing in Ukraine, including their circus. Recalling a time when artists from Czechia, France, Italy, Hungary, and Africa graced their stage, Roman believes that these bonds will be rekindled in a free Ukraine.

However, the Lviv State Circus does not venture forward alone. They voice their needs with candor, underscoring the

importance of vital support. They seek informational help to raise awareness about Ukraine and their circus, bolstering their capacity and promoting Ukrainian circuses globally. Financial assistance is also a pressing need, especially for funding festivals and cultural events, which they view as essential for nurturing the young talents who will shape the circus's future. Moreover, they eagerly seek international collaborations with circus partners abroad, envisioning joint projects that bridge cultures and illuminate the circus as a universal language of art and wonder.

The Lviv State Circus remains an embodiment of the enduring spirit of artistry and collaboration, transcending the challenges of war with a vision of unity, hope, and a vibrant future for circus in Ukraine.

In the face of adversity, the Lviv State Circus stands as a shining testament to the unwavering spirit of artistry and the power of collaboration. Through the tumultuous times of war and the challenges of our modern world, this venerable institution has not only persevered but thrived. Its story is a reminder that, even in the darkest of times, the circus remains a source of joy, hope, and inspiration [6].

In our conversations with Roman Zdrenyk, Director of the Lviv State Circus, we have glimpsed into a world where creativity knows no bounds, where artists unite across borders, and where resilience is the driving force. The circus community's unwavering commitment to their art and their audience exemplifies the unbreakable bond that binds them together.

As they face the future with optimism, the Lviv State Circus extends a heartfelt invitation to the world. The doors to their enchanting world remain wide open, beckoning audiences from near and far to experience the magic of the circus. They envision a time when international artists will once again grace

their stage, uniting in the universal language of art and wonder. In a world marked by uncertainty, the Lviv State Circus reminds us that the spirit of creativity, collaboration, and unity can overcome even the most daunting of challenges. With their eyes set on a brighter tomorrow, they inspire us all to believe that the show will go on, and that under the big top, the world is a place of boundless possibilities.

The State Kharkiv Circus, among the most venerable and esteemed institutions of its kind in Ukraine, boasts a rich and storied history that stretches back through the ages. The pages of this history book are adorned with the achievements of countless generations of circus artists and workers, each contributing to a legacy that continues to shine brightly today.

The roots of the Kharkiv Circus, as recent archival discoveries reveal, trace back to the early 1860^s when heated wooden circus structures began to grace the city's landscape. Nevertheless, it is Albert Salamonsky, the renowned Austrian entrepreneur, who is often credited with establishing the first true stationary circus in Kharkiv. Over the years, Kharkiv witnessed a succession of circus proprietors, including the Godfrey brothers, A. Fürer, the Nikitin brothers, Chinizelli, and others, each leaving their mark on the city's vibrant circus scene. Yet, it's not merely about the dates but rather the remarkable creative contributions of pre-revolutionary circus luminaries that truly define Kharkiv's circus legacy. Figures like A. Salamonsky, the Nikitin brothers, the Bim-Bom duo, the Durov brothers, and I. Piddubny, among others, graced the circus stages of Kharkiv with their exceptional talents. Over time, the humble wooden structures gave way to substantial, purpose-built circus buildings.

In the early 20th century, Kharkiv boasted not one but two grand brick circus venues – *the Grikke Circus* in 1906 and the enduring *Mussuri Circus* in 1911. These magnificent

structures not only housed spectacular circus performances but also served as venues for theater troupes, earning them the moniker "circus-theaters." These architectural marvels ignited a newfound passion for the circus arts, captivating the hearts of Kharkiv's residents.

The Kharkiv State Circus, the oldest in Ukraine, was officially founded in 1886, cementing the city's reputation as a hub for circus excellence. Today, its grand edifice accommodates over two thousand spectators, replete with modern amenities like air conditioning and special elevators, ensuring a comfortable and captivating circus experience.

The Kharkiv Circus, with its rich heritage and enduring commitment to the art form, continues to shine as a beacon of entertainment and culture in Ukraine. Its legacy of excellence, stretching back more than a century, is a testament to the enduring power of circus to inspire, enchant, and unite generations of audiences.

In the heart of Kharkiv, amidst a city with a rich cultural heritage, we find ourselves in conversation with a luminary of the Ukrainian circus world – Oleksii Zhytnytskyi, the esteemed Director of the State Kharkiv Circus and an honoured artist of Ukraine. His journey, marked by dedication and passion for the circus arts, offers a unique perspective on the challenges and triumphs faced by one of Ukraine's most prestigious cultural institutions.

The weight of a full-scale invasion on Ukraine has cast a profound and devastating shadow over the country's cherished circus industry. The impact has been nothing short of catastrophic, with repercussions that are expected to reverberate long after the war's end. The State Kharkiv Circus, a beacon of entertainment and culture, finds itself among the hardest hit, standing silent in a city that has long been a bustling hub for the arts.

In the current dire circumstances, the Kharkiv Circus stands as a stark exception among Ukraine's seven circuses; it remains closed and unable to perform. For over a year and a half, the city of Kharkiv has enforced a ban on any activities related to the demonstration of performing arts, including theaters. This blanket restriction has dealt a devastating blow to the city's vibrant cultural scene.

Yet, amidst this harsh reality, there exists a puzzling disparity. While cultural institutions like circuses and theaters have been silenced, other sectors, including dolphinariums, restaurants, and shopping malls, have been permitted to continue operations. The incongruity of these measures leaves many puzzled, especially when considering the vital role cultural institutions play in nurturing the human spirit.

A poignant lament is reserved for libraries, places of profound importance that have also fallen victim to the ban. The loss of access to literature, from scientific and publicistic works to fiction, is a concerning trend that threatens the development of vital reading skills.

The financial strain on the Kharkiv Circus is palpable. While the circus still relies on earnings accumulated before the outbreak of war, the toll of maintaining two significant buildings, necessitating extensive repairs, restorations, and essential purchases, has been formidable. While the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy has been a source of support, covering salaries for circus employees, the funding is insufficient to address the broader financial challenges tied to the circus's infrastructure.

In these challenging times, the Kharkiv Circus stands as a symbol of resilience and the enduring spirit of the arts. Its silenced stages are a poignant reminder of the far-reaching impact of conflict on culture, underscoring the urgent need for support and recognition of the vital role cultural institutions play

in the fabric of society. As Ukraine continues to navigate the tumultuous waters of war, the hope remains that the circus, along with the broader cultural landscape, will rise once more, bringing light and inspiration to a nation in need.

The Kharkiv Circus, once a thriving symbol of joy and wonder, now faces a stark and challenging reality shaped by the enduring conflict in Ukraine. In the past year alone, the circus has expended approximately half a million in efforts to address pressing reconstruction needs, an endeavor that is a testament to their unwavering commitment to the art form.

One such example of their extensive repair work is the creation of a shelter for circus visitors – an essential facility given the ongoing conflict. This shelter has now been officially registered on the list of shelters in the city, obliging the circus to open its doors to anyone in need during times of crisis. However, the paradox lies in the fact that, despite having this lifesaving facility, the circus remains unable to resume performances, a poignant reminder of the complexity of their predicament.

Yet, the financial burden of maintenance pales in comparison to the toll exacted on the circus's human resources. The extended period of inactivity has taken its toll, with a significant portion of the circus's once-formidable team having moved on. What was once a workforce of 150 skilled professionals has dwindled to just 50, a number that continues to shrink. While not yet catastrophic, this steady attrition threatens to erode the circus's core expertise.

The loss of key personnel is particularly poignant. For instance, a valued employee who served as the circus's lighting director is no longer part of the team. The unique demands of such a role within the circus necessitate extensive training, making it challenging to find a suitable replacement. The orchestra has also been significantly affected, with members

departing for opportunities abroad or changing careers altogether.

This human toll is not just a localized concern for the Kharkiv Circus but a broader tragedy for the entire nation. The loss of skilled and experienced professionals is a challenging and far-reaching consequence that could hinder the revival of the circus industry in Ukraine.

The Kharkiv Circus, once a vibrant cultural institution, now stands as a symbol of both resilience and adversity. Its closed doors and diminishing workforce paint a poignant picture of the enduring impact of conflict on the arts. As Ukraine perseveres through these trying times, the hope remains that the circus, like the nation itself, will find the strength to rebuild, reviving its role as a source of inspiration and unity [4].

The State Kharkiv Circus, an architectural and cultural gem, faces a new challenge: safeguarding the historic building against the ravages of time, neglect, and war. With each passing day, the demands of maintaining this grand edifice grow more complex, testing the limits of resources and resilience.

As the circus braces for its second winter without heating and water, the dire financial constraints become ever more evident. The colossal building, now silenced and closed, stands as a testament to both its grandeur and its vulnerability. The costs associated with utilities are staggering, and in past years, a substantial portion of the circus's earnings was dedicated to meeting these expenses. With the building's continued closure, these funds have evaporated, rendering heating and water a luxury that cannot be afforded.

The consequences of this neglect extend beyond the immediate financial strain. The lack of water circulation poses a threat to the building's infrastructure, jeopardizing its future integrity. Pipes and plumbing, left unused for extended periods,

deteriorate more rapidly, necessitating costly replacements in the near future.

One stark irony lies in the fact that the Kharkiv Circus, if allowed to resume its performances, could generate the revenue required to maintain the building and provide artists and audiences with suitable working conditions. The very institution that needs support to survive is itself a source of potential sustenance.

Leaving of artists from Ukraine has further complicated the circus's ability to craft professional, high-quality programs. The absence of these skilled performers leaves a void, making it challenging to present the kind of grand spectacles that captivate audiences. Even the smallest of productions remain halted by the ongoing restrictions.

Despite the bleak circumstances, there is a glimmer of hope. The dedicated team at the Kharkiv Circus is tirelessly working on preparations for the coming winter, driven by a deep commitment to preserving this cultural treasure. As they confront the formidable challenges ahead, they do so with the unwavering belief that, one day, the circus's doors will swing open once more, allowing its magic to inspire and unite audiences anew.

In the circus world, where the extraordinary is the norm and the unimaginable is the daily fare, the arrival of war was, for some, a sadly expected twist in the narrative. As the storm clouds gathered on the horizon, many sensed the impending tempest. Among those with a sense of foreboding was a familiar face in the Ukrainian circus scene, who had long been attuned to the circus's unique cadence of challenges and triumphs.

This journey through uncertainty began on the international stage. As the Director of the Kharkiv Circus, a role that carries the responsibility of safeguarding a cherished cultural institution, there was little room for surprise when the

drums of war began to beat. At precisely that juncture, alongside Serhii Kabakov, Director of the State Circus Company of Ukraine, a journey took them to the grand Budapest Circus Festival, where our interviewee served as a jury member. Subsequently, they ventured to the Festival Internacional del Circ Elefant d'Or in Girona, Spain. Surrounded by performers and circus enthusiasts from across the globe, the sense of camaraderie and shared passion for the art form made it easy to forget the gathering storm.

On February 23, a day that would soon become etched in memory, a seemingly innocuous flight from Kyiv to Kharkiv unfolded an ominous portent. The passengers boarded the plane, expectations set on the impending journey. Yet, after 40 minutes of waiting, the flight was abruptly canceled, with “bad weather” cited as the cause. Suspicion hung heavy in the air, for the weather that day was far from treacherous. A former aviation professional, our interviewee couldn't dismiss the unease. Without hesitation, a decision was made – to embark on a bus journey home, an instinctual response to the encroaching uncertainty.

As the hours passed and the bus neared Kharkiv, the sight of four converging lanes of vehicles heading in the opposite direction painted a stark picture. It was 6 AM when the realization crystallized – the war had begun. A timely return home, a journey made through instinct and determination, would become a poignant symbol of commitment to the circus.

For weeks, some found themselves stranded away from home, a captive audience to a world unraveling. The abruptness of the war's onset left many unable to return to the familiar embrace of Kharkiv.

As the Kharkiv Circus navigates this tumultuous period, the greatest challenge lies in securing its financial future. The institution draws from the earnings of shows performed before

the war, but with performances suspended, the funds steadily dwindle. Priorities shift to essential expenses, such as electricity and portable heating units, to ensure a semblance of normalcy for those tasked with preserving this cultural treasure.

In a world where the unexpected has become a daily companion, the circus perseveres. The path forward may be uncertain, but the unwavering commitment to protect and preserve the magic within the grand walls of the Kharkiv Circus remains undiminished. In the end, it is this dedication to the art form and to the people who make it possible that will see the circus through its greatest challenges.

In the face of unprecedented challenges, dialogue and collaboration have emerged as the cornerstone of the Kharkiv Circus's path forward. As the circus strives to navigate the uncertain terrain of war and its aftermath, engaging in a constructive dialogue with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy has become imperative. The aim is clear – to chart a course that preserves the circus's cultural legacy while addressing the unique circumstances imposed by conflict.

At present, the circus stands as the sole institution among Ukraine's circuses that remains silent and shuttered. With a seating capacity of 2,075 but limited to hosting only 406 visitors due to the size of the shelter, even a resumption of performances will require careful considerations and compromises. The need for open channels of communication with the Ministry of Culture is paramount, as the circus community seeks a collaborative approach to weather these challenging times.

The circus's reliance on funds earned before the war, combined with an inability to generate revenue through performances, underscores the need for financial support. Essential expenses, such as electricity and heating, must be met to ensure the comfort and safety of those entrusted with preserving the circus's magic.

In this journey marked by uncertainty, international partners have played a pivotal role. The support from volunteer organizations has been substantial, with the donation of generators standing out as a practical and appreciated gesture. Beyond tangible assistance, emotional support from abroad has strengthened the circus's resolve.

Notably, the Director of the Capital Circus in Budapest, Peter Fekete, extended a warm hand of friendship and solidarity. Hosting a delegation from Ukraine, he facilitated a meeting with directors of Ukrainian circuses, fostering an environment for dialogue and collaboration. The joint effort culminated in a scientific conference, where the challenges facing the circus world were discussed at length, with a significant portion devoted to Ukraine.

This exchange highlighted the differing working models in Ukraine and Europe. While Ukrainian circuses are predominantly state-owned and government-supported, European counterparts tend to operate as private institutions. The insights gained from this dialogue have been invaluable as the circus community explores innovative solutions.

Maintaining connections with international partners through circus festivals has proven equally critical. These festivals offer a window into the evolving landscape of circus arts, showcasing the highest standards and emerging trends. Witnessing performances of exceptional quality and those that fall short provides valuable benchmarks, guiding the circus's ongoing pursuit of excellence.

The circus arts, like all art forms, are dynamic and ever-evolving. Even traditions, as enduring as those in the Chinese circus, are subject to change. The rich tapestry of circus schools worldwide, each unique in its approach, mirrors the diversity and innovation found in the global circus community.

In the end, the Kharkiv Circus's journey through adversity underscores the resilience and creativity inherent in the circus arts. As it seeks to protect its heritage and chart a path forward, the circus community stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, adaptation, and the enduring spirit of cultural exchange.

The art of crafting captivating circus shows is a delicate dance of creativity and innovation. In the case of the Kharkiv Circus, this process is further complicated by the absence of a resident cast – a unique challenge that has spurred constant evolution and fresh perspectives.

Unlike the Kyiv National Circus, which maintains a consistent roster of resident artists, the Kharkiv Circus relies on a revolving door of talent. While this arrangement may seem daunting, it offers a distinct advantage – the ability to continuously reinvent the show programs. With most circus artists boasting two well-honed acts, the circus can transform its offerings by adjusting music, costumes, and concepts while retaining the core performances.

Prior to the onset of war, the Kharkiv Circus typically presented an impressive array of five to six different shows annually, each an intricate blend of artistry and spectacle. These performances were a testament to the circus's commitment to offering fresh experiences to its loyal audience.

One of the standout productions was “Circus on the Water” a resounding success that played a pivotal role in the circus's financial stability during these trying times. The proceeds from this show continue to provide critical support for the circus's operational expenses.

Looking to the future, the circus's visionary director harbors ambitious dreams. A collaboration with the Kharkiv Operetta Theatre on a production of “Mister X”, composed by Hungarian maestro Imre Kalman, represents an exciting

prospect. The story unfolds within the circus's very walls, providing a perfect synergy of circus artists and operetta actors. This fusion promises an organic and mesmerizing performance that transcends artistic boundaries.

Though challenges loom large and uncertainty abounds, the Kharkiv Circus remains unwavering in its commitment to delivering magical experiences.

In the aftermath of war, a profound transformation awaits the circus, beckoning it into a new era that must align with the evolving tapestry of society. As the world emerges from the shadows of conflict, the circus, too, must reinvent itself, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

The circus, an enduring art form that has stood the test of time for millennia, will not remain untouched by the seismic shifts brought about by global events. Yet, amidst the uncertainty, there lies an opportunity to redefine its role in a world forever changed.

In the wake of war's upheaval, the circus must emerge as more than just a spectacle. It must evolve into a sanctuary – a place where individuals can rediscover their inner strength, ignite their passions, and find solace in the enduring belief in the power of human potential. The circus, once a realm of wonder and marvel, must now become a beacon of hope, resilience, and happiness.

Conclusions. The post-war circus is a canvas upon which to paint the vibrant hues of a reinvigorated cultural tradition. With deep roots in Ukrainian heritage, circus arts are poised to thrive once more. Ukrainian artists, known and celebrated around the world, bring a wealth of talent and creativity that can propel the circus to new heights [8].

As society yearns for a return to normalcy and craves the rekindling of cultural experiences [3], the Kharkiv Circus stands ready to welcome its audience once more. The appetite for

cultural events remains insatiable, and the circus's faithful following eagerly awaits the reopening of its doors.

In this juncture of change and transformation, the circus finds itself at the intersection of history and modernity [1]. Its future lies in its ability to adapt, to embrace the spirit of its age, and to continue captivating hearts and minds with the timeless magic of the circus arts.

The circus, like the world it inhabits, will never be the same. Yet, it holds within its very essence the power to transcend adversity, to reinvent itself, and to forge a path toward a brighter, more hopeful future – a future where the circus remains a source of wonder, inspiration, and joy for generations to come.

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**ТВОРЧА ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ЦИРКІВ СХІДНОГО ТА
ЗАХІДНОГО РЕГІОНІВ УКРАЇНИ У ВОЄННИЙ ЧАС:
ЗА МАТЕРІАЛАМИ БЕСІД
ІЗ ДИРЕКТОРАМИ ЦИРКІВ**

Анотація. Ця стаття є першою частиною комплексної дослідницької ініціативи, присвяченої висвітленню досвіду керівників цирків в Україні в складні часи. У ньому представлені інтерв'ю з двома видатними режисерами зі Львова та Харкова. Розповіді, запропоновані цими цирковими візіонерами, висвітлюють глибокий вплив війни та лихоліття на циркову індустрію в Україні. Ця стаття є першим елементом більшої розробки, метою якої є спілкування з директорами цирків по всій країні, висвітлення унікальних історій цих культурних бастионів і стійкості, яку вони втілюють. У цій серії ми

досліджуватимемо багатогранний вплив війни на українську циркову спільноту. Ми заглибимося в особистий досвід режисерів, почуємо їхні історії про триумфи та труднощі, а також дізнаємось про механізми подолання, які дозволили їм продовжувати прагнення розважати аудиторію навіть у часи кризи.

Крім того, ми проллємо світло на нагальні потреби українського цирку сьогодні. Крім оплесків і овацій стоячи, ці заклади борються зі своїми власними проблемами. Цирк, вічна форма розваги, еволюціонував, щоб адаптуватися до мінливого світу, але зараз стикається з кризою іншого роду – такою, яка вимагає підтримки, розуміння та визнання його культурної значущості.

Приєднуйтеся до нас у цьому повчальному дослідженні в українському цирку, де магія не потьмяніла, а навпаки, освітлила шлях стійкості та надії перед лицем труднощів. Ці історії директорів цирків є свідченням сили мистецтва, пристрасті та спільноти у найважчі часи, пропонуючи нам зазирнути у світ, де шоу має тривати, незалежно від обставин.

Ключові слова: цирк, Україна, Львівський цирк, Харківський цирк, культурна спадщина, культурний обмін, творчість, післявоєнне відновлення.

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