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Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage amidst Military Conflicts: The Case of Folk Music Recording Archives' Safekeeping in Ukraine (From 2014 to 2022 and 2022 to the Present)

It is often declared in works on the history of ethnomusicology that the emergence of ethnomusicology as a discipline, i.e. its distinction from musicology (initially as comparative musicology) and folklore studies, is closely associated with the invention of audio recording technologies, namely the phonograph of Thomas A. Edison at the end of the 19th century as it was implemented briefly in fieldwork studies (Dovhalyuk 2016: 6–7). The use of phonograph for the recording of folk music made it possible to capture the exact sound of a song or performance for further preservation and accurate notations. The phonograph revolutionized transcription methods and the subsequent analysis of musical texts—their tonal and scale structures, rhythmic characteristics, and more.[1] It is difficult to imagine today's ethnomusicological investigations without audio and/or video recordings. During the past century and a half, changes and improvements in sound recording technologies, quality, and storage formats have enabled scientific and education institutions, museums and archives to accumulate large collections of folk music of different peoples. These collections are constantly updated with new fieldwork and documenting entries, forming a repository of intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Such collections usually have a special status for preservation and require special environment conditions for storage. Unfortunately, the reality does not always meet all needed requirements, especially in times of crisis. For example, natural disasters, military actions, and shifts of political regime put

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[1] Thus, for example Carl Stumpf's "Tonsystem und Musik der Siamesen" (1901), Alexander J. Ellis's work "On the Musical Scales of Various Nations" (1885) or Otto Abraham and Erich M. von Hornbostel's "Vorschläge für die Tanskription exotischer Melodien" (1909–1910), and others became landmark musicological works, whose appearance is associated with the latest acoustic and recording technologies of that time.

the archival collections at risk of destruction. In such cases, researchers face challenges in not only preserving and organizing the archives (a rather complex task even in normal conditions) but also protecting them from physical and digital destruction in abnormal situations.

Ethnomusicologists in Ukraine have faced such challenges since the winter of 2013, with the start of the Revolution of Dignity in Kyïv, the annexation of Crimea, and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, and even more so since February 2022, with the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, the collection, preservation, and study of folk music in Ukraine have always been complicated due to the historical and political circumstances of the country throughout last centuries. As a result, a lack of continuity in folklore recordings and fieldwork, along with varying methods of preservation and organization, difficulties with or absence of state support in both Soviet and independent periods, and a shortage of qualified personnel are characteristics common to most folk music archives in Ukraine today. Current attempts to financially and informatically support archives in Ukraine by national and foreign initiatives are often met with issues of complicated bureaucracy. State institutions are also unable to establish a transparent system for attracting sponsorship or project funding for the digitization, processing, and accessibility of collections. This article will examine the main obstacles, needs, and issues of Ukrainian folk music archives, along with some possible options to solve and overcome them.

The specifics of folk music recordings and their preservation in Ukraine: Methodology and technology for folk music archiving and collections

The formation of a national idea and, later, statehood, which emerged in Ukraine, as in most European countries during the Romantic era, is associated with a shift in interests toward folklore and folk art. The first theoretical works and collections of Ukrainian folk music appeared in the early 19th century and contained mainly lyrics and ethnographic explanations. The first musical scores belong to the so-called compositional period and were written by composers from Ukraine and neighboring countries (Hungary, Poland, the Russian Empire, etc.), including Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Mykola Lysenko, and others. The Western part of Ukraine (namely, its historical region of Galicia), which at the beginning of the 20th century was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also fell within the scope of the famous project *Folk Song in Austria* [Volkslied in Österreich] (Dovhalyuk 2005).

The appearance of the phonograph in Ukraine and the first recordings of folk music are associated with the activities of prominent figures and researchers of folk music, both Ukrainian and foreign. The first attempts to record and archive folk music in Ukraine are considered to be the recordings made by Ukrainian patron and diplomat Theodor von Steinheil in 1898 (Dovhalyuk 2017: 302). Russian singer and researcher Yevgeniya Linyova also carries out a trip across Ukraine and further to other Slavic countries, publishing her very personal impressions of the fieldwork (Kunej 2008: 32–35). The first and most important centers for collecting and archiving folk music in Ukraine are considered to be the Lviv research institutions (Lviv University and the Lviv Lysenko Music Academy), where luminaries of Ukrainian ethnomusicology such as Filaret Kolessa, Stanislav Lyudkevych, and Osyp Rozdolskyi worked, along with the Kyïv Cabinet of Musical Ethnography, founded by Klyment Kvitka, which later became a part of the Maksym Rylskyi Institute of Art Studies, Folklore, and Ethnography.

Klyment Kvitka, together with his wife, famous Ukrainian poet and writer Lesya Ukraïnka, and his student Volodymyr Kharkiv, were some of the first collectors of Ukrainian folk music on phonograph records affiliated with Kyïv. The center founded by Kvitka is still active today and preserves the largest and oldest collections of folk music on phonograph records in its archive. A considerable number of phonograph recordings are also kept in private collections, such as the Kolessa family archive. In addition to Ukrainian folk music, there are also extensive collections of music from other nations. For example, the Vernadsky National Library Archive in Kyïv has one of the world's largest collections of Jewish music recordings, recorded by folklorist Moisei Berehovskyi, covering 1,017 wax cylinders (Dovhalyuk 2017: 309). Most of the wax cylinder recordings have been digitized by foreign partners (US and EU institutions). The Rylskyi Institute, the Odesa National Academy of Music and some museums preserve recordings on the folk music and dance of national minorities in Ukraine, such as Bulgarians, Gagauz, Moldovans, North Azovian Greeks, and others. However, these collections are mostly undigitized and undescribed.

An important center for the study of traditional Ukrainian music and the preservation of audio and video recordings from folklore fieldwork since 1960s is the Research Laboratory of Musical Folklore at the Kyïv National Music Academy. Although the collection contains a large number of recordings gathered on various media, from reels and cassette tapes to different digital audio and video formats, the collection does not hold an official status of archive, since the recordings were originally made as education material for students and were not intended for archival storage. Furthermore, the majority of the recordings stem from the private fieldwork of researchers associated with the Research Laboratory

of Musical Folklore. In addition, digitization and storage are carried out largely on a voluntary basis by several laboratory staff members and researchers (Klymenko 2008: 53–116). At the same time, this collection became the basis for the development of a large-scale research project to map the melodic types of ritual songs of Ukraine, carried out by Iryna Klymenko, the head of the Research Laboratory of Musical Folklore, involving most of the researchers of the so-called Kyïv School of Ethnomusicology (Klymenko 2021).

The foundations of the methodology for analyzing the melodic and rhythmic types and patterns of Ukrainian folk songs were first laid down by Filaret Kolessa, Stanislav Lyudkevych, and Klyment Kvitka in the beginning of 20th century, later improved by Volodymyr Hoshovskyi, and finally modernized by Iryna Klymenko and Bohdan Lukanyuk during our time (e.g. Klymenko 2021). The principles of the methodology lie in the extraction or definition of song types or patterns and identifying the rhythmic model (archetype) of each song and song group by observing their distribution across the territory, which ultimately outlines the nature of the spread of individual musical and traditional dialects on the map of Ukraine. This process reveals regional and national characteristics of the structure of the song tradition and demonstrates or confirms some historical and ethnographic boundaries of ancient settlements.

Such a task in Ukrainian ethnomusicology, which has become pivotal for today's researchers, requires specific analytical processing of fieldwork recordings. Therefore, the descriptions and organization of Ukrainian folk music collections, in addition to the technical metadata and identification data (such as the exact place and time of origin, information about informants, incipit, etc.), also contain extensive analytical ethnomusicological data (defined genre, rhythm type or pattern, modal ambitus, anchor tones, type of performance and performance circumstances, etc.). Such information helps Ukrainian researchers operating today to statistically sort and calculate the spread of the patterns and types of rural songs, defining the local musical dialects. It should be noted that each research school in Ukraine (i.e. scientific centers in Kyïv, Lviv, some individual representatives in Kharkiv, Kropyvnytskyi, Dnipro, Uzhhorod, and others) has developed its own methods of processing its archival records, which are often discussed at numerous conferences but have not yet arrived at a single standard throughout Ukraine (for example, the Kyïv conferences "Slavic Melodic Geography"; "Ukraine. Europe. World: Ethnomusicology Section[2]; Lviv conferences "Researchers of

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[2] E.g. the Program of VIII Conference "Ukraine, Europe, World: History and Names in Cultural and Artistic Reflection", November 7–9, 2024.

Folk Music of the Red Ruthenians (Galicia-Volhynia) and Neighboring Lands"[3], thematic conferences organized by the Lviv Academy of Music and Ivan Franko University, etc.). This issue is still relevant for Ukrainian scientists. Researchers such as Andriy Vovchak (2009, 2022), Oleh Korobov (2011), a young researcher Oleksandr Kropyvnyi (2022), and others are constantly working on practical solutions. Based on the freely accessible digital archive, Andriy Vovchak and Iryna Dovhalyuk (2024) have compiled a set of recommendations for fieldwork and the preservation of materials for ethnomusicology students, with a further standardization and facilitation of the process of adding to the existing digital collection (see Appendix).

The Ukrainian diaspora also plays an important role in preserving and presenting Ukraine's intangible cultural heritage to the world and, as it has turned out, in supporting the preservation of recordings in times of crisis. First and foremost, this is due to the large diaspora in Canada and the US, which formed in several waves from the second half of the 19th century and enabled the establishment of centers for Ukrainian studies currently operating around the world. The old recordings of traditional Ukrainian music from the diaspora, which also have their own specificity as migrant heritage, were initially recorded with better quality and are sometimes better preserved than recordings from the same period in Ukraine. The information about published recordings, both foreign and Ukrainian, from 1908 to 2010 has been collected and published by Iryna Klymenko in her catalogue (Klymenko 2010). Current open access online materials on Ukrainian folk music and dance are listed in an article by Iryna Danyleiko (2022).

Considering the above, it should be noted that due to various historical, political, and economic factors (belonging to different state formations over the centuries, the collapse of the USSR, the economic instability of the first years of independence of Ukraine, revolutions and wars), the collection and archiving of folk music in Ukraine, whose territory encompasses a significant number of regional Ukrainian traditions as well as the traditions of national minorities, has not received the necessary continuity in methodology and state support in terms of funding and legislation for the creation of modern archives. There are numerous existing problems, such as the conditions for storing physical media and their accessibility. For example, due to geopolitical changes, some of the collections are

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[3] E.g. the Program of XIII Conference of Researchers of Folk Music of Red Ruthenians (Galicia-Volhynia) and Neighboring Lands: https://lnma.edu.ua/kafedry/kafedra-muzychnoji-folklorysty-ky-ta-pndlme/cimpx-iii/ (accessed August 20, 2025).

originally stored or have been taken to storage centers in other countries during the occupation, such as the collections of Ukrainian recordings stored in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities in Russia, making it impossible for Ukrainian researchers to access these records. In addition, digitization, description, open access, sufficient qualified staff, and technical support are prevalent issues. These challenges have only intensified during the hostilities in Ukraine, adding to the threat of the destruction of historical collections, complications, and additional work for researchers.

Folk music archives amidst conflicts: Organizations, conventions, and protocols

After the world wars in the first half of the 20th century and a number of wars of our time, which were accompanied by the destruction and loss of world cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, international organizations founded mainly after World War II (such as UNESCO) have developed conventions and protocols to prevent the destruction of cultural heritage during disasters of various kinds[4]. Many countries have their own protocols and documents for action in case of danger on a national level. More specific recommendations and standards have been developed by various organizations directly involved in archiving or associated with the production of audiovisual content[5]. In addition to the principles of physical media preservation, there are separate protocols in the digital age for ensuring backup copies and principles of access to digital information. In Ukraine, the protocol for emergency actions in the National Law on Archives is limited by the short description of the principles for handling collections[6].

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[4] See, for example, the United Nations Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity.

[5] E.g. Standards of International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA): TC 03: The Safeguarding of the Audiovisual Heritage: Ethics, Principles, and Preservation Strategy (web edition): https://www.iasa-web.org/tc03/ethics-principles-preservation-strategy (accessed August 20, 2025); Protocols of International Council on Archives (ICA): https://www.ica.org/resource/guiding-principles-for-safe-havens-for-archives-at-risk/ (accessed 20.8.2025); Project on Films, Television, and Sound Archives at Risk: https://archivesatrisk.com/ (accessed 20.8.2025), etc.

[6] Order 296/5 of Ministry of Justice from March 3, 2015 on the Approval of the Regulations on the Conditions for the Storage of Documents of the National Archival Fund, Article 9: Requirements for Security Measures, Paragraph 3. It is said that: "In the event of an accident, fire, or other emergency that threatens the integrity and safety of documents, security personnel are required to take immediate measures to rescue them (using appropriate means, calling the fire department, emergency services, the head of the archive, or the institution). In extreme cases, security may open the storage facility and then draw up a report on the reasons for such action. The report shall be approved by the head of the archive or institution.": https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0250-15#n14 (accessed August 20, 2025)

Regarding events that took place in Ukraine's Soviet period, the Center for the Protection of Cultural Heritage from Technogenic Disasters[7] was founded in Kyïv to engage in the collection and preservation of artifacts, for example, related to traditional culture affected by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident as well as areas flooded during the construction of reservoirs on the Dnieper River between the 1930s and 1970s. Some master's and doctoral theses on ethnomusicological studies were defended in Kyïv during the last decades, focusing on the traditional music of territories of listed technogenic disasters[8].

Possible risks related to preserving archives

The risks to which collections and archives may be exposed depend on various factors, such as the geographical location of the collection, political and climatic changes, and unpredictable events. When it comes to the risks faced by folk music archives during military conflicts and political regime changes, which often involve violent revolutions, it is worth taking a closer look at Ukraine's experience since 2014. The Revolution of Dignity, which began in late 2013 in Kyiv, subsequently spread to a significant number of cities in Ukraine and was followed by further military and political actions in the country, namely the annexation of Crimea and the start of military actions in Donbas. It took place on Independence Square, in close proximity to institutions that hold various archives, including collections of folk music recordings. At that moment, the archives were in danger of destruction by fires that could have been caused by protesters to counter the security forces trying to disperse the protests[9]. Before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine around the beginning of 2022, there were cyberattacks on various resources on Ukrainian folk music. For example, some Facebook groups that announced scientific events on ethnomusicology in Ukraine were banned due to a sudden and excessive number of complaints. In addition, one of the websites with a collection of Ukrainian folk songs created in 2020–2021 in collaboration

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[7] The website of the Center for the Protection of Cultural Heritage from Technogenic Disasters of Ukraine (in Ukrainian): https://www.kulturapolissia.org.ua/uk/ (accessed August 20, 2025).

[8] E.g. Vovk, O. (2006). *Songs of the Flooded Land: Traditional Ritual Songs from the Dnipro and Lower Sula River Basins*. Collection of musical and ethnographic materials: master's thesis. In 2 Vol. Kyiv. 129 p. See also Maria Sonevytsky and Adrian Ivakhiv (2016).

[9] See the short documentary of Hromadske TV and music band Dakh Daughters on the events of that time on the main square of the capital of Ukraine: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6Y-WUkQqKs8&list=RDs6YWUkQqKs8&start_radio=1&ab_channel=hromadske (accessed 20.8.2025). Content warning: sensitive content.

between Ukrainian and Canadian researchers was attacked, and all its recordings disappeared. After being restored, the website has continued to be attacked periodically during the full-scale war.

Naturally, during military operations, all collections of folk music are at risk of physical destruction, and there are numerous known cases of museums being destroyed[10]. At the same time, moving a physical archive also poses certain risks. For example, moving records from a special room or environment is risky due to changes in temperature and humidity (especially in humid climates or when moving to unsuitable basements), which can lead to mold growth on tapes, reels, or wax cylinders.[11] In addition, the loss or damage of some media, as well as the loss of accompanying records or field materials, is always a risk during such transfers. At the same time, the relocation of records abroad to areas where there are no war conditions is considered by most protocols to be the safest option, albeit the last resort for saving a physical archive. In such cases, agreements need to be signed between the parties transferring and receiving the archive. For collections registered within the national archives of a country, it is necessary to involve a special commission and obtain special permits for replacing them abroad.

Support from partners and grassroots initiatives

With the start of large-scale military operations in Ukraine, a significant number of partnership initiatives aimed at preserving cultural heritage have emerged. Supported financially by foreign organizations or volunteer assistance, various programs to help Ukrainian archivists, museum workers, and researchers who preserve collections have been established with the aim of physically or digitally preserving collections. The types of support include the provision of special equipment for digitization, workshops on digitization and heritage preservation by foreign specialists, mentoring hubs initiatives for creation projects on preservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage[12], and the provision of digital space for backup

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[10] E.g. the destruction of the Hryhorii Skovoroda, Ukrainian philosopher and poet, museum: https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/ukraine-culture-destroyed-skovoroda-museum (accessed August 20, 2025).

[11] A description of such a situation involving destroyed recordings after evacuation and how they have been restored can be found in an article by Karafin A. Mežnarić on the digitization of Zagreb folk music archive (2007).

[12] E.g. Several stages of "Hata Hub" were held online, where participants were provided with advice on creating their own projects, IT workshops and support, and teams were formed to work on projects: https://hatahub.digitizing.space/en/en#Partners (accessed August 20, 2025). As a result of one of such initiative, the online collection on Ukrainian lullabies was created by Oleh Korobov, a Ukrainian ethnomusicologist and an expert in fieldwork and the multi-channel recording of polyphony songs, (see the link for "Lullaby Museum" in the Appendix).

copies, among others. For example, the American Society for Ethnomusicology has provided cloud storage space for all Ukrainian ethnomusicologists who want to preserve their folk music archives in digital form.

A volunteering grassroot initiative, SUCHO[13], which gathers specialists from universities and scientific centers from Europe and the USA, was launched to support Ukrainian specialists in the preservation of cultural heritage amidst war. They gathered donations for providing Ukrainian archives with technical equipment, worked on digital online archiving, recorded several workshops on internet archiving, and took other actions toward preservation. At the same time, researchers forced to move abroad have had to carry their private collections with them[14].

An important case of preservation through the evacuation and further digitalization of folk music collection inside Ukraine is the project "The Collection of Stepan Myshanych", implemented by ethnomusicologists from Lviv (Yurii Rybak, Larysa Lukashenko and others) and funded by "House of Europe" in 2024–2025. The collection consists of materials and fieldwork recordings of folklorist Stepan Mychanych (1936–2013) and his students from Donetsk National University. The biggest number of recordings were collected in the Donbas region, which is now a place of intense military operations, and territories that are under Russian occupation (partly since 2014, partly after 2022), highlighting the importance of such a collection, digitalization and publication process[15].

Another example is the publication of archival fieldwork recordings from Eastern and Southern Ukraine (territories currently partly occupied) on the streaming platform YouTube by the participants of folk music revivalists' ensemble "Bozhychi" (Illya Fetysov, Susanna Karpenko, and others). The recordings are part of their private archive. Although the value of these materials is undeniable, questions of research ethics regarding the publication of video materials from occupied territories while military operations are ongoing remain highly controversial[16].

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[13] Source: https://www.sucho.org/about (accessed August 20, 2025).

[14] For example, the 17th issue of the journal "Problems of Ethnomusicology" published at the end of 2022 was created amid full-scale war and the migration of researchers from the Ethnomusicology Laboratory at the Music Academy in Kyiv. The photos on the cover of the magazine show, among other things, the evacuation of the institute's researchers: *Problems of Ethnomusicology.* Vol. 17. Edit. Iryna Klymenko. Kyiv. 173 p. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31318/2522-4212.2022.17

[15] The collection was published in the digital collection of Ukrainian folklore created earlier – Electronic Archive of Ukrainian Folklore (see Appendix). The page of collection: https://folklore-archive.org.ua/subfund/3 (accessed August 20, 2025).

[16] However, the authors of the publications refer to the example of UNESCO's publication of the nomination of the Crimean Tatar ornament Ornek in 2021, attributing this tradition to the indigenous peoples of Ukraine: https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ornek-a-crimean-tatar-ornament-and-knowledge-about-it-01601 (accessed August 20, 2025). See the link to the Collection on YouTube Channel in the Appendix.

Another case of grassroot initiative supported by national and foreign funds is the collection of fieldwork recordings made during summer 2024 as part of the cultural project "Budzhak Musical Heritage" (Artem Tselikov as the chief researcher). The grassroot initiative devoted to national minorities of Ukraine, particularly to peoples of ethnographic region of Budzhak (Southwestern Ukraine, Odesa administrative region), became an indicator of democratic changes in Ukraine and the intensification of the process of Westernization during the war[17].

Such an intensification of grassroots initiatives toward gathering (when possible), digitalization and publication of folk music recordings of Ukraine is the result of the rise of national identity, which leads to major interest to national "roots" as well as an increased risk of destruction of cultural heritage and its carriers. The big wave of migration with the beginning of full-scale war led to the rise of interest toward folk music among Ukrainian refugees, who are abroad feeling homesick and unrooted. The new waves of folk music revival movements, in contrast to the previous wave(s), attract a wide audience, often consisting of proactive young people. Increased interest in society toward subjects related to national identity contributes to increased demand for access to archives and recordings of folk music.

Lack of conclusion

In order to compensate for gaps such as the complicated bureaucratic system, the complexity of grant funding for state institutions that maintain archives, restricted access to collections, and their poor digitization, grassroots practices are working through short-term projects aimed at meeting the needs of communities. This explains the significant increase in the number of such initiatives during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In addition, the simplified bureaucracy and the short durations of such projects (which, on the one hand, are their disadvantages), enable such activist actions to be more flexible. At the same time, they lack a systematic scientific approach, and significant questions arise regarding the guarantee of personal data protection, research ethics, and copyright issues. These problems require better communication between activists, grassroots practitioners, researchers, and government authorities. The tools of bottom-up communication are needed to ensure the preservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage, which is under significant threat of destruction during the war.

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[17] See the link to the YouTube channel with fieldwork recordings in the Appendix.

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Appendix

The list of the links to selected Digital Archives and Collections of Ukrainian and Slovenian folk music recordings

Description	Link	Originality of the source	Originality of music
Polyphony Project	https://www.polyphonyproject.com/en	Hungary	Ukraine
Electronic Archive of the Ukrainian Folklore	https://folklore-archive.org.ua/	Lviv, Ukraine	Ukraine, West
Digital Archive of folklore of Sloboda Ukraine and Poltava Region	https://folklore.kh.ua/en	Kharkiv, Ukraine	Ukraine, East
Folklore of Kirovohrad region: Personal website of Oleksandr Tereschenko	https://sites.google.com/site/muzfolkkgr/	Kropyvnyt-skyi, Ukraine	Ukraine, Central
"Folk Songs of Ukraine": collection of folk music from different part of Ukraine	https://folk-ukraine.com/	Canada	Ukraine
"Bubny in Ukraine": high-quality photos of Andriy Levchenko collection of Ukrainian traditional tambourins	https://bubny.in.ua/	Ukraine	Ukraine
"Kolyskova museum": the collection of Ukrainian tra-ditional lullabies	https://www.kolyskova.com/	Ukraine	Ukraine
Great Transformation: William Noll's archive of Ukrainian village culture	https://greattransformations-ua.org/en/	USA	Ukraine
Filaret Kolessa phonograph cylinder collection	https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Filaret_Kolessa_phono-graph_cylinder_collection/uk	Ukraine	Ukraine

Bohdan Medwinsky Ukrainian Folklore Archives – Kule Folklore Center, University of Alberta	https://archives.ukrfolk.ca/	Canada	Ukraine
Budzhak Music Heritage, YouTube collection	https://www.youtube.com/@budzhak.heritage	Ukraine	Ukraine, Southwest
"Bozhychi" YouTube Collection of Private Archival Recordings	https://www.youtube.com/@bozhychi_archive3893	Ukraine	Ukraine