

# The Arts of War: Ukrainian Artists Confront Russia

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## A Summer's Frolic Under Emerald Skies

*Young songwriter Drevo combines rock and traditional Ukrainian motifs to celebrate a world imagined by thousands who have grown up during the twenty-first century.*

Gen Z heartthrob Drevo's [Emerald Skies video](#) sat atop the Ukrainian charts this summer. A faultless seasonal jingle, Drevo's presents a bouncy refrain about young love against the backdrop of an effervescent bikini-attired sunglasses-clad blonde nymph frolicking on a beach at sunset. The emerald sea and sky unleashed Drevo's yearning to return to his cavorting muse.

The video's music is just the kind of cheerful earworm that sounds best on a summer day at the seashore. Nothing unusual, except for Russia simultaneously unleashing some of the war's most brutal airborne assaults on Ukraine's civilians. Then again, perhaps, a lighthearted romp is what Ukrainians want to hear to forget the realities of the moment.

A child of the twenty-first century, singer and songwriter Drevo gained national notoriety when he became a finalist for Ukraine's representative at the Eurovision 2024 competition. He was born Maksym Derevyanchuk in the northwestern Ukrainian municipality of Varash (known as Kuznetsovsk between 1977 and 2016). The settlement, which dates from 1577, had been transformed during the 1970s into a company town attached to the newly constructed Rivne Nuclear Power Plant.

Initially, Drevo – an archaic Ukrainian word for tree -- set out along a path that might have led him back to Varash by earning a degree from the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. School, however, never captured his imagination. His pursuit of a football career ended in disappointment. These letdowns pointed him towards music, which he had enjoyed as a child. He understood that music controlled his soul. He set about teaching himself guitar and trying his hand at writing lyrics.

For Drevo, success derives from self-reliance. As he tells his story, he was strumming on his guitar, moved to a studio where he and his buddies came up with something interesting. They pulled together some videos and sent them out into the world on TikTok and YouTube. Listeners noticed. His songs garnered tens, then hundreds of thousands of followers. This self-made triumph emboldened Drevo to submit audition materials to the national panel selecting contestants for the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest. His advance as a finalist attracted innumerable enthusiasts and allowed him to bring professionals onto his production team. He became a pop idol.

These accomplishments connect to an upsurge in Ukrainian pride among his generation. His most successful music fuses rock elements with Ukrainian motifs as he delves into themes of love, longing, and introspection. This combination has enabled him to reach different audiences who might not otherwise have listened to one

another's music. Ukrainians, he has argued through his music, should value everything Ukrainian, join in speaking Ukrainian, and listening to Ukrainian. Ukrainians in all fields need to popularize the Ukrainian brand and not look elsewhere – especially Russia – for outside validation and inspiration.

Drevo's approach to building a career is emblematic of a rising generation of Ukrainians who look to themselves for inspiration. Like the songster, they don't seek endorsement from their elders or from abroad. They aren't particularly interested in reliving a past that was never theirs. Instead, they turn to social media to build a future they would like to embrace (such as joyous romps in emerald seas under emerald skies).

Some of Drevo's most powerful music explores the agony of Ukraine's present. His 2024 song *Endless Chain* speaks of a pain like pouring rain, which drives him insane in an endless chain. Yet, "we don't stop quietly." Perhaps not stopping quietly means that there always will be the promise of the welcome respite of an exuberant gambol on a beach.

