

What you can do

1 Watch with open eyes

Now you know the story behind the stage. Notice what tonight's show leaves out, and whose version of Ukraine it tells.

2 Ask the question

Why does a Russian ensemble perform Ukrainian dances while Russia wages war on Ukraine? Ask the organizers and the venue. Your voice as an audience member matters.

3 Hear Ukraine from Ukrainians

Seek out Ukrainian artists, dancers and musicians. Scan the QR code to see real Ukrainian costumes, region by region.

4 Talk to us

Stop by our table tonight. We're glad to answer questions and share more.

We contacted the ensemble, university representatives and the building's administration. The program did not change, but we were given space to share our perspective, and we are grateful for that.

Ukrainians value the First Amendment, and we are using it right now. But freedom of expression does not oblige anyone to provide a platform. Who gets a university stage is a choice, and we hope future choices will take the context into account.

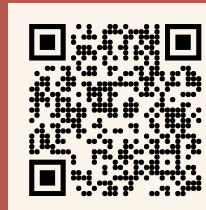
Experience Ukraine for real

Thank you for reading. If tonight made you curious about Ukrainian culture, we would love to show you the real thing: our music, food, traditions and people.

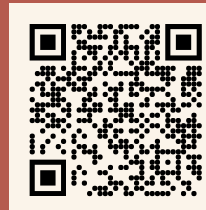
Join us at our events and meet the Ukrainian community of Hampton Roads!



It is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit that brings together local Ukrainians and their American friends through culture, education and humanitarian aid. We support Ukraine and report openly on how every donation is used.



regular supporter



one-time donation

No one can support every cause, and we understand that. So we ask for one thing: when you choose who to support, include your local Ukrainian community. We help Ukraine, keep Ukrainian culture alive here, and report on every donation!

PROGRAM NOTES

The part you won't find in tonight's program

When a Russian ensemble performs Ukrainian dances while Russia bombs Ukraine, **it's never just a dance.**

Open to understand more ►



Traditional dress of the Zaporizhzhia region, about 75% of which remains under Russian occupation.

Photo: Anna Senik



Assimilation is official policy

Vladimir Putin and Kremlin officials insist that Russians and Ukrainians share one history, culture and faith: a “triune” unity of one people (“On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” by Putin).

A Russian troupe performing Ukrainian dances, while Russia wages war on Ukraine, acts out that claim. That makes tonight’s performance by Ensemble Barynya political, whatever the intent.

And... Russia’s assimilation doesn’t stop at Ukraine ▼

130+ endangered languages inside Russia, despite its claims to be multinational: almost every native language except Russian and Tatar (UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger).

Many regions, many costumes. Not one stereotype

What tonight’s stage shows is a simplified version: bright satin, ribbons, one generic “Ukrainian look” for everyone.

Stage costumes are always stylized, and that’s not the problem. The problem is the image of Ukrainians it creates. Soviet folk ensembles reduced dozens of regional traditions to one cheerful, colorful cliché: picturesque, rural, harmless, and a happy member of one Soviet family. Audiences abroad believed it.

Tonight’s show continues that tradition. Watch it knowing this is not Ukrainian culture, but Russia’s version of it.

This is what you’ll see on stage ▼



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In reality, Ukraine is home to many ethnographic groups, including Hutsúls, Bóykos, Lémkos and Polishchúks, each with its own dress, music and dance. And this is what we look like. Compare!



Scan to see Ukrainian costumes, region by region, on video.



Photos from “Shchyri” and “Vesilnyi Spadok,” projects that recreate authentic Ukrainian regional costumes.