

Nurturing peace through music for war-affected children in Donetsk, Ukraine
International Students House in London
Project leader: Nikita Burzanitsa | Summer 2022

Summary

My project aimed to nurture peace through music engagement with the gifted children music school in Donetsk, Ukraine. With the incredible help of the school in these current difficult circumstances, I helped organise music masterclasses, concerts and musical activities tailored to the pupils of the school through the Davis Peace initiative.

Project Description

The criminal and illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine had inflicted the population of Donetsk, and Ukraine at large, with the terrible consequences of war and human suffering. According to the UN commission of human rights, there were 13,477 civilian casualties as a result of the war that broke out in February 2022. The psychological trauma of war and civil unrest in the country had struck people in the communities of the Donbas region, where I come from. Yet, children in Donetsk remain a largely marginalised demographic throughout the region, whom the consequences of war hit most hard. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and lack of security combined with insufficient resources had a terrible effect on local families and young people in the city. I grew up in Donetsk as a music student with similar conditions as a result of the ongoing aggression and conflict in our region. Our schools lack the capability to provide its talented pupils with adequate resources to train the next generation of musicians, such as music equipment and funding for teachers and staff to organise activities in the school. The effect of war on musicians is hence twofold. Therefore, I was very inspired by the previous Davis project to organise this initiative in my city to nurture a sense of peace in this music community that has been ignored in the sensational news of this conflict. As a musician, I realise the huge need for more initiatives in this field to help raise the next generation of musicians who will need more funding and professional training to grow as mature and capable musicians, especially in these incredibly dire circumstances. As a graduate from this music school, I was able to use my connections to the teachers, school community and the pupils to organise this initiative and direct the goals and outcomes of the project. I organised masterclasses, youth orchestra event, and a free community orchestra event in the school. With the help of the funding, we were able to source new music equipment such as a new piano for the facilities. It was a great privilege to work together with these incredibly talented musicians and raise this peace effort in our communities. However, due to the current circumstances, we had to cut some days in the project or postpone some planned days of the project plan to others in the timeline. We also had to cancel the last event we planned, which was the extra concert we planned with local teachers in other schools. While this led to uncertainty and some anxiety I faced in organising this initiative, it taught me to adapt my plans and cope with these difficult times in profound ways reminiscent of my childhood. Both deeply personal and communal, fostering this peace through war made me believe more than ever before in the power of music to instil connection between us and the younger generations in ways that other activities and military weapons cannot. I will continue to seek out more funding opportunities and chances to organise deeply touching and culturally important initiatives such as this one in the future.

Reflection

This initiative taught me that peace is a deep cultural and community connection between those most deprived of resources and at the margins of society. It, however, remains an active reconciliation process between the nation and world at large on one hand and small local communities on the other. This was evident in my project, where children were able to experience a sense of peace and

belonging between each other and music in a culturally significant way, against the horrors and anxiety of war that they go through everyday. In the shorter term, these project participants have developed music skills and a school piano that they will incorporate their daily practice into. It is an urgently needed funding avenue which they will use to continue their passion for music and a distraction from the anxiety of the conflict more widely. In the long term, it is an active process of developing the next generation of musicians, with an understanding of the importance of music especially in times of war. It is also an investment in the music education of the community and in countering the challenges they are going through. It was a very difficult emotionally-intensive project, which made me truly re-evaluate the value of music, culture and the world at large. The challenges I went through in the uncertainty of carrying it out made me a more courageous and determined person, and reinforced my willingness to participate in reconciliation processes and peace-making in Ukraine, especially towards a dedication to the youth. It is without any doubt that I will carry forward this new inspiration I discovered in fostering peace through music through other initiatives, movements and cultural events in the future. The dilemmas of the world require such dedication, and I will work towards it until Donetsk and Ukraine are at peace again. It is these projects that remind us of hope in the most difficult times.

Personal Statement

The willingness of children in Donetsk to partake in the music activities I organised for this Davis Peace project and develop their enormous talents in difficult times deeply touched me. I have learned to always be hopeful, determined and courageous in facing the most unimaginable challenges of our time. I am indebted to the Davis Peace funding for making this project possible