

# [***Eugene Hütz Of Gogol Bordello: Uncovering Of Ukrainian Identity***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:689X-H581-DXVP-543Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Eugene Hutz speaks with Katya Soldak, exploring the topic of Ukrainian identity and Ukraine's cultural presence in the West.

**Body**

https://www.forbes.com/video/6327763086112/

Gogol Bordello, a New York-based punk-rock, multinational band, spent over a year actively supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russia s war. The band played about 70 shows since the start of the invasion last year across 25 countries, raising funds and partnering with human rights organizations to help Ukraine. Eugene Hutz, Gogol Bordello s Ukraine-born front man, talks about the band s experience championing for Ukraine around the globe in a video interview with FORBES s Katya Soldak. Hutz explores the topic of Ukrainian identity and cultural presence in the West, how it s always had a very strong place in Western culture without being properly recognized. The following are some highlights from Eugene Hutz interview.

**Looking back at the past year:**It s not really just this year. The story goes a lot further. For people who are just finding out about it, it is something that came to undeniable catastrophic proportions they have to pay attention now. The resistance (Ukraine s resistance against Russia) goes back for centuries. It became extremized to an insane degree. The very name Gogol Bordello has been selected specifically because of this resistance. To keep telling people Ukraine is not Russia, it was never Russia and never will be Russia. Gogol is not a Russian author, but he s a deeply Ukrainian writer.

**On decolonization of Ukrainian culture and getting from the Russia s shadows. Inside Ukraine:** For Ukrainian writers and artists it was always clear that they were not in any kind of shadow. Particularly when Ukrainian punk-rock started because punk rock doesn t beat around the bush and cuts to the chase bands like VV (Vopli Vidoplyasova), Braty Hadiukiny, Kolezhsky Asessor were people who were championing Ukrainian language, as well as painters, and poets, and teachers in high schools in Kyiv.**Outside Ukraine, in the West:**People are up against mythology, here in the States. They are dealing with mythology of some grandeur that never existed; the imperial conglomerate that s called Russia it s only a matter of time, because it s not what it is; it s a propagandistic idea. And now, through their doings they re showing to everyone what they really are.

**On Ukraine s cultural renaissance in the USA, featuring Ukrainian culture, art and music**. Ukraine is a very humble nation. And in a way, it s been too humble for its own good for centuries. The impact is here, but those people who make this impact keep it super chill and cool and they don t brag about it. I ve met quite a number of prominent Ukrainian people with whom we would not even get to the subject of their Ukrainianness . That was not an important thing. We re living in New York city, or Vancouver, or London. We were speaking because we were doing music, or culture, whatever we were discussing. This [being Ukrainian Forbes] was not out unifying force. It s a very cosmopolitan walk of mentality, which is very progressive. And then I d meet those people in Ukrainian celebrations in Soyuzivka, Upstate New York. I was always blown away how well preserved Ukrainian culture was here, in diaspora. Ukrainian identity was preserved here in a much more colorful way then during Soviet Ukraine, it s a fact.

**On famous cultural figures and their Ukrainian roots such as Andy Warhol, Kazimir Malevych, Carroll of The Bell by Mykola Leontovych:** That generation in the 20th century, several generations were very much on the kick of I m going to be whatever I think I can imagine to be . It s very Kerouac, very Bob Dylan, very Lou Reed. All the grates. They never bragged about their roots [Russian Empire, present Ukraine or Poland Forbes] and all the families can be traced back to Odesa, Lviv The whole cluster of kind of subcultural iconic ideas That particular area of Eastern Europe, its mental, artistic and spiritual vector is actually very Western European in spirit.

**On music and *politics* and whether the world is united in its support for Ukraine.** Of course it [music and art] can be [non-political], but not during times like this. Anything anybody does right now is political. The situation is transforming. But the main thing is uncovering actual Ukrainian identity, and for people to keep learning and understanding. The idea that people said: Oh, you are from Ukraine, it s like a part of Russia? That idea that s been disseminated for so long on the wings of Soviet propaganda, now people feel like morons if they re saying that. They kinda get the point: probably if those guys were from the same tribe they [Ukrainians] wouldn t be resisting so hard. Now everything is kinda clear, as far as that goes.

**On Ukrainian language and Russian language as the tool of propaganda.**As of now, with uncovering [Ukrainian identity] and global education about Ukrainian identity, Ukrainian language has become a more emphasized thing. But for people in Ukraine that is not an issue. Both of those languages come from that territory. This whole idea that these people talk in Russian they might be pro-Russian is completely idiotic. Half of my family speaks Russian, so what? Language is a technology. They just exchange information and move on with their day. But of course right now it s a more emphasized thing and it should be a more emphasized thing. As for the entire cultural presentation yes, I am there too. But as far as the street level of Ukraine, day-to-day operation, it s not a politicized issue. Back in Ukraine, when we were there in August (2022) you could speak either way and people would reply to you either way. That is not an issue. It s a really irritating issue, actually.

**About Gogol Bordello s trip to Ukraine and military base concert.**Obviously, the cultural front is playing a tremendous role. So, it s pretty undeniable what it can do. But even when you do so much by bringing people together, by introducing to each other, and by fundraising for humanitarian causes it still feels like it s somehow not enough. And I know a lot of people are driven by this feeling during the war: whatever they do, they need to do more. At least in my circle. And, we ve been thinking about going there and being more tangible since the war started. It took a while to put together, it s the chaos of war. That visit was not about seeing friends and family, it was about doing that particular mission on the military base and refugee hubs. It was incredibly reassuring to speak with all the soldiers, to see that their morale is very high.

**What would be a victory for Ukraine?** It having the means to reestablishall the borders as they were, including Crimea, of course, and going into the future with enough means for confident defense. I think, luckily, thanks to the world, it s pretty much coming together.

**The text has been edited for length and clarity.**

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