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Be My Guest: Nation Branding and national representation in the Eurovision Song Contest.

Since its inception in 1956, the Eurovision Song Contest has been a stage for national representation and an opportunity for countries to brand themselves. The 2012 Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, Azerbaijan is a prime example of nation branding, both for the host country as well as the participating countries. Hosting the event affords each country the opportunity to present a specific artistic image as well as a national brand, but other participants are only given a three-minute musical performance for their presentation of a national/cultural image. In this thesis, I highlight the role performed by deeply symbolic national musical performances within highly publicized European contexts to examine how nation-states negotiate the aesthetic, political and mediated format of the Eurovision Song Contest as a means of nation branding. Specifically, I focus on the concept of identity to consider how a popular musical performance can represent national or even European identities in the context of televised song competition. Secondly, I study the translation of national identity into an image that can potentially appeal to all of Europe. Lastly, I study the performance of these nation brands in specific cases during the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest. I contribute to the field of festival and European music cultures via a variety of multi-faceted analyses and close readings of 2012 national performances, focusing on those from Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Montenegro, which in 2012 were some of the richest performances in terms of musical style, cultural symbolism and national representation. Through these analyses, I conclude that the European Song contest remains one of the most potent, complex and formative stages for contesting, asserting and re-assessing national versus European identities.