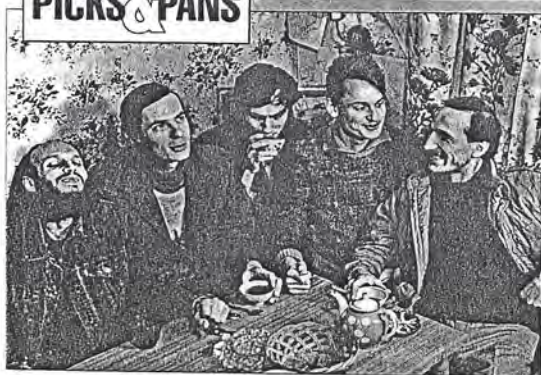


People
PICKS & PANS



Moscow's hottest "unofficial" band, Zvuki Mu, is led by Petya Mamonov (right)

Song

last summer Soviet authorities for the first time permitted a Russian rock band, the well-established *Stas Namin Group*, to tour the United States. While the band performed a series of 12 concerts, a bleached-blond

rocker from Los Angeles named Joanna Stingray was opening up an even more unlikely view of rock behind the Iron Curtain. Traveling in Russia as a tourist in 1984, Stingray had managed to infiltrate the burgeoning, "unofficial" and semiunderground rock world in Leningrad and Moscow. She smuggled out tapes, then compiled an al-

bum, *Red Wave: 4 Underground Bands From the U.S.S.R.* (Big Time Records). Selling some 10,000 copies, *Red Wave* showcased Russia's hottest groups—among them Leningrad's *Aquarium*, whose 33-year-old lyricist-guitarist Boris Grabenchikov has become a Soviet superstar. Though its music was unsanctioned until recently, *Aquarium* now has released its first record on the state Melodiya label.

Gorbachev's policies may have liberated rock as much as film and literature, in part, some feel, because the state feared losing control of the rock scene. Others see the new rock freedom as an attempt by the state to reach the growing numbers of disaffected Soviet youth. Ignoring the self-contradiction, the state has established official "rock clubs" in Moscow and Leningrad to stage unofficial music. A rock club event isn't advertised, but kids hear about it on the grapevine. Leather-jacketed youngsters throng concerts in cafes like Leningrad's Saigon and Moscow's

Metelitsa to hear popular groups such as *Alisa*, whose lead singer, 27-year-old Kostya Kinchev (dubbed "Dr. Experimentor"), affects a cross between Nina Hagen and Billy Idol. Perhaps the most charismatic and provocative band is Moscow-based *Zvuki Mu*, whose brilliant vocalist Petya Mamonov is given to howls—and leaps of faith, literally falling backward off the stage into his audience's arms. Despite enormous difficulty in getting instruments, the groups aim for sophistication. *Strango Games* takes its influence from ska and its lyrics from French poetry. *Kino* (whose guitarist, Yuri Kasparyan, is scheduled to marry Joanna Stingray this month) has forged a unique fusion of Russian rock and Western pop.

While most of the groups are wary of the official overtures they are beginning to receive, others flatly reject any Faustian bargain with the authorities. *Televizor* has repeatedly ignored a ban on publicly performing its song *Get Out of Control*, and as a result *Televizor* plays even less frequently than other bands. *DK*, a raw and raunchy group (which took the same name as the Young Communist League's band), refuses to play at all in the Moscow Rock Club because it feels the club is merely the state's way to co-opt the band. As always the state's motives for letting the good times roll are mixed. Returning to the U.S.S.R. after the release of *Red Wave*, Joanna Stingray was summoned to VAAP, the state copyright agency. "They were very angry," she recalls. "They wanted a piece of the royalties."

Alisa's Kostya Kinchev (center) poses with his band at Leningrad's Rock Club

