

Music

Soviet rock exposure could help detente

Rock music has been the rallying point for numerous causes during the past year. Now, thanks to a 25-year-old Los Angeles singer, it also may become a tool with which to improve U.S.-Soviet relations.

Late last month Big Time Records released a double album package called *Red Wave: 4 Underground Bands From the U.S.S.R.* The records are the result of the intriguing and tireless efforts of Joanna Stingray (also known as Fields), who made her first trip to the Soviet Union two years ago and befriended members of numerous Soviet rock bands.

Stingray discovered a vibrant Soviet rock scene. Bands weren't simply playing Beatles cover tunes. They wrote and sang in Russian.

"I didn't think there was a rock scene there," Stingray says. "I was shocked it existed. It was Russian rock in its own right. The music came from their culture, from where they live. It had a special energy."

The bands she heard were "unofficial" bands, not recognized by the government and therefore unable to use government recording studios and restricted to performing in people's homes or small clubs.

Stingray points out that these bands "are not dissidents. Their lyrics are not blatantly about politics. They just play rock 'n' roll."

They remain "unofficial," she says, because they refuse to relinquish control of their work. Bands such as Kino, Alisa, Aquarium and Strange Games, the four groups featured on *Red Wave*, prefer total artistic and creative freedom and in several cases have rejected offers from the government to become "official" bands.

Stingray, her code name during phone calls with Soviet band members, attended recording sessions and concerts, videotaped the bands and began smuggling two-track tapes out of the country.

She says her determination to compile a record of Soviet rock music and release it here was heightened by two incidents in 1985. The Soviet band Autograph, which performed at Live Aid last July, was not representative of the Soviet rock scene she had come to know after a half-dozen trips to the USSR. Autograph was more akin to a lounge act. The truth needed to be known.

But more importantly, Stingray was talking to some American teens at a California amusement park one day. She asked them what they thought of the Soviets. The reply: "We've got to blow them away."

Says Stingray: "What other opinion could they have? I realized then that I had something to show that the Russians are people just like us.



Scott Benarde

Rock/Pop



Soviet rock band leaders include, from left, Vitia Sologub, Boris Grebenshikov, Victor Tsoi and Kostya Kinchev.

From that point on it was important to get the tapes out."

She won't say how, but with the help of her sister Judy, she got the "unofficial music" out of the country. She also was able to get copies of *Rolling Stone* and *Musician* magazine into the country and also, with the cooperation of companies such as Yamaha and Fender, has delivered music equipment to these bands. She recently "sent" the underground bands 50 copies of *Red Wave*.

She hopes the Soviets will view the record as she does — a vehicle to better understanding between two peoples.

"There are wonderful cultural things going on between the U.S. and Soviet Union, but it's done between governments. This was done between people. This album is for kids. Maybe the government will see it has nothing to fear."

She is sending copies of *Red Wave* to President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev along with letters explaining how she thinks the record can help world peace.

"We can live with the political differences. It's more important to

realize we have more in common as people. We are much the same."

Stingray's bold initiative already has generated the expected Hollywood fallout. She has been approached by film companies and publishers for her story. She also may get a record deal for her own songs, many of which she has co-written with members of Soviet bands.

If the record deal comes through, she plans to continue her attempt at improving U.S.-Soviet relations by including Russian rock songs on the flip sides of her singles.

She also has 20 hours of videotape she is editing into a one-hour documentary on the Soviet rock scene.

And she soon will find out just how the Soviet Union views her good intentions. Stingray has just applied for a visa to make her ninth trip to Leningrad in August.



Joanna Stingray has helped Soviet bands get Western exposure.