

Joanna Stingray Preaches Vegetarianism, No Smoking and More

By Vladimir Yelbaev
Special to The Tribune

"While here in Russia everything seems to be categorised, catalogued, I fall somewhere in between the usual pigeonholes. Because I was born in America, I'm not a Russian musician, but at the same time, I'm not Western, because I've built my career here."

So said Joanna Stingray, who has been working here for 10 years. The first Western musician to appear on the underground rock scene, she grew with it. Now, Stingray is a star: quite an accomplishment for a foreigner.

Meeting Joanna at her home, which she shares with musician Sasha Vastliev, reveals a softer and even con-

servative person than the woman we know on stage. Wearing a suit, and with her hair styled neatly, Joanna hardly resembles the daredevil black-leather tomboy image she projects in public.

After keeping a relatively low profile for the past three years, Stingray is suddenly advancing as a performer, recording artist and TV producer. Her two major contracts with SNC and Moroz provide for a series of releases on CD and videocassette, and TV Channel Four has been running her interviews with Western rock stars, which feature concert footage. Twenty-four programmes have already been finished for the series, and Joanna plans to visit London soon for more material.

"I aim at a broader audience, so my TV guests will represent the entire Western entertainment industry, from producers to musical groups from all across the spectrum," said Stingray.

In addition, Joanna has several other pans in the fire: a compilation CD released in cooperation with Greenpeace; a new album; a *Greatest Hits* CD. And that's not all: she's also working on new videos by Aquarium, Sergei Kuryokhin and Boris Grebenshikov.

"I'm also putting a lot of effort into a documentary of the early underground days of Leningrad's rock circles, before perestroika," she added.

To cope with the huge workload Joanna has resurrected her "Red

Wave" company thanks to a little help from her friends. "After Big Time Record Company went bankrupt in America I started looking for a suitable new partner for Red Wave," said Stingray. "I'm grateful I finally relocated to Moscow where I really belong. It's a great opportunity to make yourself heard, to contribute to a noble cause."

The noble cause, of course, is the *Greenpeace Rocks* CD. The collection of nice hits by famous artists is selling amazingly well. All royalties from sales of the CD go to Greenpeace Russia. "I trust Greenpeace because I'm sure the money goes towards the cause, and not towards the purchase of a Mercedes for some official," said Stingray.

Joanna herself doesn't have a Mercedes, opting to get around by taxi instead. She maintains what she calls an "average" lifestyle, avoiding the Metro but not riding around in a stretch limo. "Flaunting a hundred dollar bill in the face of a street beggar was never my style," she said. "I wouldn't drive a Mercedes, even if I could," explained Stingray.

And her thoughts on the Metro? "By next summer I'll release a public service announcement on TV imploring people, 'Ne nada tolkatsya that is, 'don't push'."

And what about America? What does she miss about "home"? Tennis and movie theatres, she's quick to say. "While there are tennis and bowling spots in Moscow they are several times more expensive than in Los Angeles — out of my budget. And I wish I could watch a movie in a real American air-conditioned theatre, munching popcorn, surrounded with Dolby sound."

Stingray compensates for the lack of American theatres by acting in films. Her biggest role so far was in the full length feature called *The Freak* ("urod") a couple of years ago. "The plot and my character was pretty typical; a woman who falls madly in love with a guy. I risked it just to know what the acting was like. If I act again, it'll be closer to my image: a hero, a master of her fate, dark glasses, black pants. No fur coats around. No obsessions about sex. Just me." She drives the idea home, with a stern glance.

Probably it's her flexible ways that guide Joanna Stingray to success. And her principles, too.

Greenpeace Rocks, produced by Joanna Stingray, is available from SNC Distributors (tel. 237-1093) or from major record stores. Stingray's Fan Club: 103009 Moscow K-9.



Photo by Leonida Stroganov

American Joanna Stingray, shown on tour in Perm, has no regrets making her home and career in Russia.

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