

THE POST

Beverly Hills

Russian Romance

Beverly Hills Singer-Songwriter Finds True Love, New Career in USSR

By Sheryl L. Thomas
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When the deal for what was to be her first album went sour, Joanna Stingray made her first trip to the Soviet Union in hopes of finding nothing more than a little peace of mind.

Again in Leningrad more than a year later, the Beverly Hills singer-songwriter hit the town for an evening of Russian rock and roll.

In both instances, however, Stingray, 26, got more than she bargained for. And in a country often considered a foe of the United States, she found a new career niche and the love of her life.

The deal for her first record fell through back in March of 1984, on the day before it was to have been released. So, a disappointed Stingray, a 1978 graduate of Beverly Hills High School, decided to take her sister Judy Ann up on an offer to tour Leningrad. The trip, she believed, would help her get over the record deal which, if only temporarily, had dashed her dreams of succeeding in the

music industry. And it did.

During that first trip Stingray, whose real last name is Fields, met Boris Grebenshikov, a man who she says is considered "the father of Russian rock and roll."

Grebenshikov proved to be an excellent contact, leading to a kind of musical ambassadorship for Stingray. Since that time, she has been working with Soviet and American rock bands promoting cultural exchanges. Her work primarily involves setting up and making contacts for American bands that want to perform in Russia and for Soviet bands interested in performing in the States.

She considers herself "sort of a musical diplomat" these days, taking trips to Leningrad every two to three months, staying two to four weeks at a time.

But Stingray found more than a new career in Leningrad. A very special encounter came during her second trip there about 18 months ago.

A friend had left her standing alone outside a Leningrad rock

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She met him in a rock club in Leningrad: Joanna Stingray, BHHS graduate, with her fiance, Yuri Kasparyan. For coverage of her most unique bridal shower, see page 6.

Stingray

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club one evening, with explicit instructions not to speak to anyone because of her limited knowledge of the language. But Stingray said she couldn't help but notice the man standing behind her.

"The thing I noticed was that he had bleached the front of his hair like I had," she said.

As it turned out, Yuri Kasparyan, the man with the bleached hair, was a guitarist with the band 'KINO' that was performing at the club. He also turned up at a party Stingray attended with her friend later that night.

Maybe it was the love of music — or maybe even a penchant for bleached hair — that brought the two together. Whatever it was, Stingray and Kasparyan spent a lot of time together after that first meeting, both socially and professionally. And although Stingray says Kasparyan's English is weak "but has improved," and despite the fact that "sometimes I don't

understand everything he says," the two have fallen in love and will be married on April 6 in Leningrad.

"When you're in love, you don't really need a common language," said Stingray.

Joining the couple for the ceremony will be 30 guests, including family, friends and business associates from the States, and another ceremony will take place here in October. Stingray, the daughter of Joan and Fred Nicholas and Sid Fields, said she and Kasparyan plan to divide their time living between Leningrad and Beverly Hills. Kasparyan is the son of Soviet scientists Irina Solomonova and Dimitri Faraelovich.

Since meeting Kasparyan, Stingray has produced her first album. "Red Wave — 4 Underground Bands from the U.S.S.R." (including KINO) was released in the United States last July, and is scheduled to be released soon in Australia, England and Italy. The album was originally released by Big Time records and, later, by RCA.

Though Stingray now performs occasionally with KINO, her fiance strumming away on guitar, most of her diplomatic endeavors are on standby while she plans her wedding. Still, she wants to resume her career, and also plans to write her autobiography.

"I think the more we can do between the two countries, the better it is for everyone," she said.

And as for the differences between American and Russian rock, said Stingray, "Wherever you go, rock and rollers are rock and rollers."