

A Red Wave on troubled waters

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The beginning of our story is in an article from the American publication USA Today appearing as if it were an advertisement to get a hit record; 'An American rock singer visited Leningrad a few times, got to know many of the local non-professional bands and undergroundly by smuggling took their recordings out to the US where a double album is due to be released shortly

Let us say at once that it is already out And with a misleading title on it's cover: Red Wave 4 Underground groups from the USSR' Aquarium Kino Alisa and Strange Games

First of all let's introduce the main heroine An American rock singer - this is Joanna Stingray ^{25 years old whom} although she is a singer few people in America are familiar yet

Now about the smuggled album The West German Magazine Spiegel reported that from our country Joanna secretly smuggled out cassettes pretending they were blanks She then offered them to a series of well-known US recording companies Wise men, with experience of menageries, in the first place asked Joanna the question; 'is all of this legal?' The newly-appeared producer could not give an answer to this question and so she was turned away from the firms. As a result the album was released by a Los Angeles based firm 'Big Time Records' about which, like the singer Joanna, little is known known in America But now Americans have found out 'This brave American girl helped the oppressed Soviet rock musicians' - the Western press set out to explain In what tangible way was this help expressed? it is hard to say; Stingray broke not only Soviet laws (which she was warned about during successive trips to the USSR), but also American legislation on copyright. Justifiable protests from the Soviet side (raised by the all-union agency for copyright) did not make any sort of impression on Stingray who explained her activities by 'wishing to develop friendship between the youth and musicians of the USA and USSR'

I venture to doubt the sincerity of this American lady; if she wants 'to promote peace' why is the back cover of the album adorned with the dubious quotation about 'underground musicians who aren't recognized by their own government'?

Let's take 'Aquarium' for example 'Underground'? Aquarium? What does it matter that Melodiya have released an album of theirs, available in many towns, or have taken part in programmes on national television? And who, along with others on the contraband album, have been prize winners at the festival of the Leningrad rock club?

The leader of Aquarium, Boris Grebenshikov, in his letter to the management of VAAP on behalf of the group points out that 'the designation on the record does not reflect the true status of the band', and asks the firm to take measures to change its title. However Stingray did not pay attention to these requests or to the main point, that the right to the music of Soviet groups lies completely with the aforementioned firms. With regard to the streams of slander directed at this country as a result of her activity, the smiling Joanne, by her own account, takes no responsibility. NO, she recognizes that the album caused the Soviet side 'moral and material damage'. Simply put it has, she feels, nothing to do with her. The pressing and sale of the album continues. The cover remains the same. It has to be said that the western mass media invented it all as a convenient way of justifying this pirated record.

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However the most important thing is not that Stingray was dealing in contraband music. It is that otherwise no one in the West would have found out about Soviet rock music. It's not pleasant to admit but the guilty party of this entire story, ^{it is said,} is the Soviet Union which hides away and conceals from foreigners such treasures of amateur rock music as Aquarium and Kino.

How does this match up to reality? Surely our rock stars have met more than once with Western artists. For example Christopher Cross from the group Ultravox, or just recently with UB40, music producers and journalists Yacov Van Tinnen from Holland, Trevor Jones from England, the correspondent of the West German radio station 'VDR' Günter Kpentz, the leaders of the Dutch rock association Kor Schlessler and Yop van Boysecom. And they didn't simply

meet ,but also took back with them many recordings of our musical collective including amateur groups However none of these people put the material to harmful purpose

-Your musicians have many advantages that artists in the West can only dream about-said the president of the Dutch rock association Kor Shclessler-
-For example the group AUTOGRAPH has great equipment, recieved freely from the state.And the rock-club in Leningrad? What splendid possibilities for creative growth?To my mind it is precisely these favorable conditions that ^{until recently} lead the amateur groups Picnic and Secret to become convinced professionals Returning to his own country Schlessler faithfully recorded his impressions on the pages of 'Music Maker'

However different guests act in different ways In particular;the French magazine 'Actuelle' considered Joanna's example worthy of imitation It's correspondent Toma Jonson has in recent times been to our country on severa occasions,and as a result of his voyages,under the heading Actuelle,there appeared in France a cassette-'Rock Russe 'Appearing on it were the groups Bravo,Aquarium,Telephone,Kino,and,for some reason under the name of Mashina Vremeni,Strannie Igri figured This cassette too was issued contrary to Soviet law-without the permission of VAAP or the firm with responsibility for import and export of records,Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga

The difference between Jonson and Stingray is that the Frenchman simply did not assume that there any relevant Soviet laws,but upon finding out did not cloak himself with pages of conversations concerning 'friendship' However neither did he admit to his guilt As a result-a new outlet for speculation about 'the unhappy fate of Soviet rock musicians ' Such things are being said in the west,especially at the present time,but why has no one pointed out that ever before the release of Actuelle's cassette the song White Day,for example,by the group Bravo(which appears on 'Rock Russe) was broadcast on the radio programme Yunost and during the televised concert Account 904,in a recent transmission of 'Happy lads' and even came out on a compilation disk from Moscow Panarama