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Joanna Stingray with part of her exhibit of paintings by Soviet underground artists at the Jerry Solomon Gallery.

'Red Wave' Exhibit—From Rockers With Love

Joanna Stingray Hopes Art Will Show a Different Side of Soviets

All the while Joanna Stingray was sneaking contraband tapes of Soviet underground rock bands into the United States, she never encountered any greater danger than interrogations by the KGB and FBI. Now, however, the Los Angeles-based singer/songwriter and self-appointed diplomat is facing something more serious.

Stingray, who cut an LP of Soviet underground rock in 1986, has organized an exhibit of "unofficial" Soviet contemporary art. "Red Wave" is scheduled to open tonight at the Jerry Solomon Gallery 960 N. La Brea Ave. A \$150-per-person reception at 7 p.m. is to benefit East-West projects of Greenpeace, the international environmental organization.

But Greenpeace has received two bomb threats.

"Someone [who did not identify himself] called [Monday and Wednesday] to say

By ZAN DUBIN

that he had always hated Greenpeace and always thought we were in league with the Soviets and that if we didn't cancel the show, he would bomb the gallery," said Greenpeace spokeswoman Kate Karam on Wednesday.

But the show, scheduled to run through Feb. 5, will go on, Karam said.

Karam, noting that in 1985 a Greenpeace ship was blown up off New Zealand, said the organization takes such threats seriously. She said that she has asked the police to comb the Solomon gallery Thursday and that a security firm has been hired to monitor the reception, but that no one plans to cancel the exhibit.

"This is precisely why Greenpeace is trying to promote understanding between the East and West," Karam said. "We have to be able to understand each other a little

better than this."

That is exactly what Stingray who met Karam in London when both were applying for Soviet visas, had in mind.

As was her aim with the record album, Stingray hopes the exhibit will "show th

Please see 'RED WAVE,' Page

'RED WAVE': From the Soviet Rockers With Love

Continued from Page 1

American people a different side of Russia" other than the one they see in movies such as "Rambo," as well as demonstrating that the Soviets aren't culturally "behind us and outdated."

Before producing the album, "I was in a line at Disneyland and I asked a bunch of 12-year-old boys in front of us, 'What do you think of Russia?'" said Stingray in a recent interview here. "They screamed, 'We gotta get rid of them, blow 'em up!' And I thought, if these kids could see the people I know—these punks and rockers—and the way they look and dress, I don't think they'd be saying that."

Misconceptions about the Soviets have diminished somewhat, Stingray said, especially with *glasnost*. But, she added, continued vigilance is needed to foster East-West understanding.

"I'm hoping that the exhibit will show people here that contemporary art exists in the U.S.S.R.—which people don't know—and that the young people are creating things, they are not sitting home unhappy to be in Russia. These artists don't want to defect, they don't want to emigrate."

Stingray 27 brought the "Red Wave" artworks here while surreptitiously transporting tapes of four underground Soviet bands—including Kino, of which her husband Yuri Kasparyan is a member—over a four-year period beginning in 1984.

It wasn't hard for her to find the paintings—most of them were done by the Soviet rockers. Known as New Painters, these young, experimental artists/musicians, most liv-

ing in Leningrad, work in many media, including poetry and film making. Tapes of their music will be played at the exhibit of about 80 energetic paintings by seven artists.

These artists, most in their early 20s, are classified by the government as "unofficial," those not allowed to earn money from their art, and are permitted only about four public exhibitions a year, Stingray explained. But "they are very happy and what they have said is that they are an integral part of the Russian culture."

Indeed, the artistic atmosphere around Leningrad these days is a lot like New York's SoHo of the '60s, she said. The artists take part-time jobs to devote most of their time to creativity and stage at-home "word-of-mouth exhibits" or poetry readings.

One of the artists, Timur Novikov, converted the top floor of an old building into an underground contemporary museum, Stingray said. There, the New Painters of "Red Wave" often exhibited their work. Free from the constraints of Social Realism, their artists' paintings appear on such unconventional materials as plastic, plates or T-shirts, and depict subject matter from the political to the erotic.

The works in "Red Wave" have "a real renegade quality," said Nora Halpern, curator of the local

Frederick R. Weisman collection and curator of "Red Wave."

While Stingray did have to conceal her rock tapes from customs officials, she said she traveled more freely with the artworks, all given to her by the artists.

"Either our suitcases weren't checked, or the customs agents would look at a piece and laugh and say, 'Take it!' They didn't consider these works, many of them graffiti-like or picturing primitive, dinosaur-like figures, to be art."

The underground artists represented in "Red Wave" may benefit from the Western exposure, said Stingray, who plans to take the exhibit to New York and London. "It might help them have more Soviet exhibits and maybe help them sell their works in Soviet art stores, where they haven't been able to."

But "the most important thing is that their work is shown," she said. "The fact that it is recognized, especially in the West, means a lot to them."

As for her own future, Stingray hopes her Russian husband will

visit Los Angeles for the first time next month, and she has just signed away the rights to her life story to be made into a movie she'll associate-produce with Vision Films/Atlantic Releasing.

But most important is her own music, she said. She's written 50 new songs "influenced by the Russians" with whom she performed in the Soviet Union, and has gone

back to local record companies in search of a contract.

"Underneath all of it, it's the music that I can't live without."

And the bomb threats, she added, have strengthened her diplomatic resolve. "It shows that there are still people out there that need to be shown that people are just people and these borders don't matter."