

**FROM L.A. TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE:
PROMOTER JOANNA STINGRAY
SAYS 'DA' TO HER SOVIET ROCKER**

It was a marriage of East and West. It was a marriage of art and commerce. It may even have been a marriage of convenience. But whatever it was, the marriage of American rock promoter Joanna Stingray, 27, to Soviet rock guitarist Yuri Kasparyan, 24, was not business as usual at Leningrad's Wedding Palace No. 1—a matrimonial assembly line that processes one couple every five minutes.

The groom donned a tux for the occasion, but other members of his band, Kino, sported the wild and funky garb appropriate to their station as one of the Soviet Union's most popular rock groups. And though the bride wore white—her mother had brought the elegant peau de soie gown and a bouquet of lilies of the valley all the way from L.A.—she was clearly out of her element. "This is a huge concession," said Stingray, fingering the fine material. "I never wear white, and I never wear dresses."

In fact Stingray, née Joanna Fields,

considers black jeans and leather jackets the only suitable uniform for a self-appointed envoy between the worlds of Soviet and American rock. But this was a day to honor tradition. A scratchy recording of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* played on the phonograph as Yuri and Joanna filed into the domed wedding chamber to exchange the rings they will wear, Russian-style, on their right hands. The bridal Chaika, a gleaming black limousine, waited to take the newlyweds on the customary tour of the city, during which the bride washed her hands in the Neva River and added her bouquet to the many others that were deposited at the statue of Peter the Great. First, though, the happy couple stopped to toast each other with champagne and smash their glasses on the steps of the wedding palace—a gesture of Western extravagance, and of apparent disdain for Mikhail Gorbachev's exhortations to temperance, that drew some disapproving looks from passersby.



U.S. rock promoter Joanna Stingray and Soviet guitarist Yuri Kasparyan marry in Leningrad

It wasn't the first time Stingray had twitted the Soviet establishment. Four years ago, an aspiring rock singer just out of UCLA, she visited Russia before settling down to graduate studies in child psychology. Once she arrived in Leningrad, she found herself immersed in the underground music scene. Eight trips later she had "smuggled" enough tapes of Kino and other groups out of the Soviet Union to produce an album, *Red Wave*—a kind of Greatest Hits of Socialist Rock. At first the Soviet press denigrated Stingray's tales of the "brave little American miss helping the oppressed Soviet musicians" as a self-serving fantasy. Now, though, inspired by *glasnost* if not by greed, Soviet officialdom has cut a deal with her to produce 10 albums of "unofficial music" for consumption in the U.S.

Meanwhile an American film company is planning a movie about how Joanna, who speaks little Russian, and Yuri, who is only beginning to learn English, met in 1984 and finally managed to marry this year. "It's a wonderful sto-

ry," says screenwriter Clay (*Under Fire*) Frohman, a member of the wedding party. "A real love story with the FBI and the KGB making complete fools of themselves following Joanna when she was flying in and out of the Soviet Union."

Although Stingray won't be specific, she acknowledges that she will receive a "considerable" sum for these film rights. And there are those in and out of Leningrad's close-knit artistic community who suspect her marriage is as much a commercial venture as it is a leap of romantic faith. "Anyone who spends any time with us knows otherwise," insists Stingray.

At the same time the newlyweds, who plan to split their time between Leningrad and L.A., don't seem to have given much thought to the mechanics of their bicontinental marriage. "We want to have children as soon as possible," said Yuri after the ceremony. "Maybe in the next couple of years," added Stingray by way of clarification. She returned to L.A. a

week after the wedding but plans to be back in Leningrad on Dec. 4 and hopes to bring Yuri back to L.A. for a second wedding ceremony early next year. Because housing is in short supply and Yuri earns the not-so-princely sum of \$17 for each of the four or five concerts he performs each month, the couple will live with his parents while in Leningrad, squeezing into an already cramped three-room apartment.

"They leave for work early in the morning," Stingray explains cheerfully.

"And it's great to return home late at night and find dinner waiting for you." The parents, on both sides, are less optimistic. "It's okay for now, but who knows about the future?" shrugs Yuri's father, Dimitri, who understands that political winds blow hot and cold. "I told her she was crazy," says Stingray's stepfather, Fred Nichoias, before the ceremony. If Stingray heard, she wasn't discouraged. "Right now I feel so lucky that I've found Yuri," she says. "You don't think about the problems. We'll deal with them later." □



The happy couple change for the reception in their new Leningrad home—a room in the ap