

RED ROCK



Judy Ann

In Moscow's Red Square (above), Joanna Stingray shot a video. "No one looked at us," she says. "Maybe they thought we were in the KGB."

BLACK-MARKET SOVIET MUSIC HITS THE U.S.

In the Soviet Union, there's party music, and then there's Party music. The official, Kremlin-authorized pop groups like Auto-graph, as Americans saw via satellite during Live Aid, are so stodgy they'd probably lose a battle of the bands against Lawrence Welk. That's why Russian youth is bopping instead to hip, Westernized—and illicit—tunes like those uncovered by visiting Los Angeles rock singer Joanna Stingray, 26. "I was totally shocked," she says, "by the rock scene over there."

Now, thanks to the fact that Stingray has turned producer, you too can hear what makes Ivan boogie. She has smuggled out tapes of these underground groups by techniques she won't reveal, because she travels constantly to the U.S.S.R. (Moscow is apparently aware of her efforts but has not tried to interfere with her so far.) Nine trips since 1984 have provided music's Mata Hari with enough audio contraband to issue a double album, *Red Wave*, and a handful of videos featured lately on MTV's *International Hour*.

Picture World
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Leningrad's Rock Club is one venue the authorities set aside for unauthorized bands. It's not illegal to perform, just to be paid for it or to sell records.

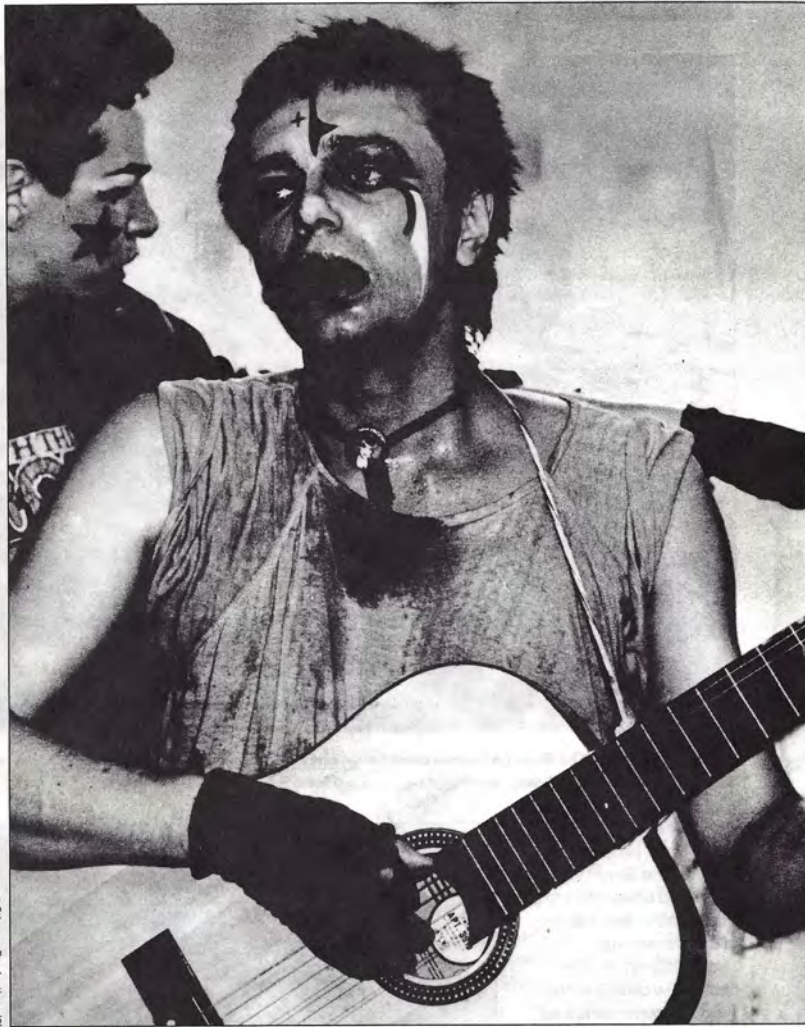
The four groups playing on *Red Wave*—Kino, Aquarium, Strange Games and Alisa—all operate around Leningrad, the Soviet Union's cultural capital and hotbed of unhousebroken rock. The

songs are strikingly contemporary and measure up to any European pop music. But the sound is expectably rough: the recording is done in primitive home studios and then bootleg-copied

from fan to fan. Instruments cost a commissar's ransom (a \$300 electric guitar runs \$3,000 on the Soviet black market)—which is why Stingray always tries to bring in equipment. "The guys had



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Kostya Kinchev is the singer for the group Alisa. His wild makeup and costumes have earned him the stage name "Dr. Experimentor."

tears in their eyes when they saw a drum machine," she says. "They've been dreaming about having this stuff."

The unofficial bands are prohibited from receiving any money for performing

and are banned from the country's one and only record label, Melodia. Otherwise, though, the groups face relatively few hassles from Moscow, because, as Stingray explains, "these

guys aren't dissidents or enemies of the state." Lyrics tend to be more poetic than political, as on this composition from Boris Grebenshchikov of Aquarium: "I close my eyes / I pray to water /



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The Strange Games band hangs out in a Leningrad park. Their music has a reggae flavor, with lyrics translated from French and Cuban poetry.

Water cleanse us one more time." Boris, perhaps the most famous Soviet rocker, has turned down offers to go official rather than compromise his creativity.

Indeed, artists like Grebenschikov could give their Western counterparts a lesson in singing the lunch-bucket blues. In the Soviet Union able-bodied males must hold authorized jobs, so the underground musicians look for those with the shortest workweek. Thus when Victor Tsoi isn't leading his band Kino, he can be found laundering towels and mopping up at a bathhouse. Marvels Stingray:

"Can you imagine David Bowie working three days a week at a boiler?" ♦



Soviet fans make pilgrimages just to hear or touch Boris Grebenschikov, who recently cut a duet with Joanna Stingray of *I Got You Babe*.