

Threats Prove Idle; 'Red Wave' Wins Praise

By ZAN DUBIN

Anonymous bomb threats protesting an opening-night reception for a show of Soviet underground contemporary art proved to be idle saber-rattling Thursday night, and the paintings won praise from an assortment of community leaders and Hollywood celebrities attending the event.

"Red Wave," with works by seven "unofficial" Soviet artists, was organized by Joanna Stingray. The Los Angeles-based singer/songwriter, who cut an LP of underground Soviet rock in 1986, put together the album and the exhibit hoping to promote East-West understanding by showing a different side of the Soviets than the limited one she says she sees depicted in such movies as "Rambo."

"The more we can show the different kinds of Soviet people, the more people here are going to understand we have a common bond with them," Stingray, 27, said. She was given the artworks by the artists (one of whom she married last year) and has been bringing them home, along with the rock tapes, since 1984.

Thursday's \$150-per-person reception—attended by local art collector Frederick R. Weisman, film star Rosanna Arquette and rock singer Graham Nash—benefited East-West projects of Greenpeace.

A spokeswoman said the international environmental organization had received two bomb threats last week and had been accused of being "in league with the Soviets" by the unidentified caller.

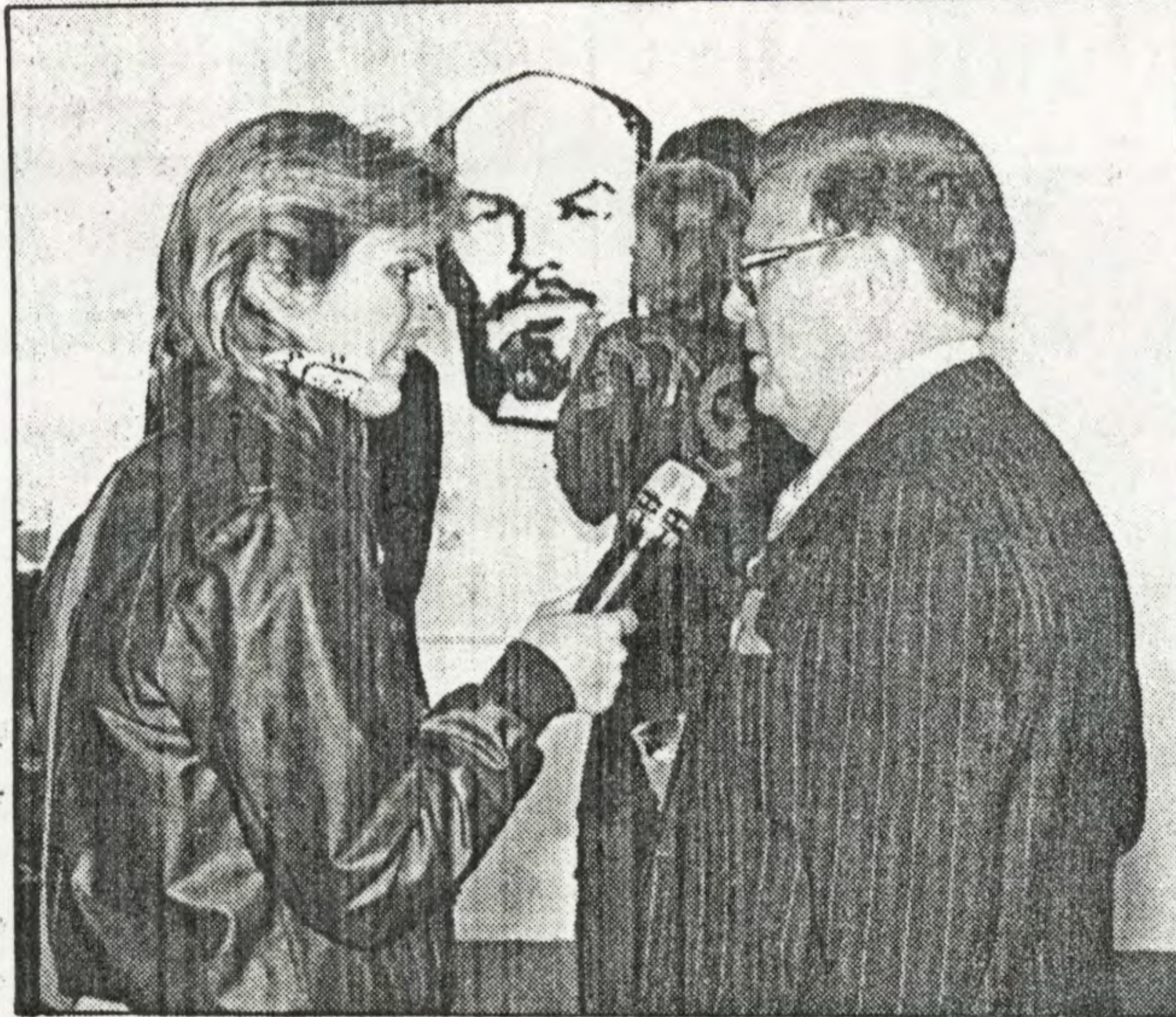
However, the only surprises Thursday seemed to come from the 350-person crowd that showed up at the Jerry Solomon Gallery on La Brea Avenue to see the art and sip Stolichnaya.

Esther Ben Or watched a "let it all hang out" 1960s-style home-made music video—all the exhibit's artists double as rockers (some also as writers or film makers) and most are heard on Stingray's album.

"I didn't expect it from Russia—to be so wild and open," Ben Or said.

"I think it [the art] is fresh and primitive and original—and very surprising to have come out of the Soviet Union," said Frederick Nicholas, a Museum of Contemporary Art trustee. Nicholas is also Stingray's stepfather and a friend of Weisman, whose multimillion-dollar art collection is curated by Nora Halpern, curator of "Red Wave." Halpern and Henry Hopkins, Weisman collection director, also attended the opening.

The experimental "New Painters," as these young Leningrad artists are called, frequently commandeer unusual materials—butter paper, shower curtains or computer printouts—as canvases



Reporter Gloria Goodall with collector Frederick R. Weisman.

for exuberant depictions of themes ranging from the political to the erotic.

Because the Soviet government classifies these artists as unofficial, they are not allowed to make money from their work and are permitted few public exhibitions, Stingray said. Yet, she said, they thrive creatively.

"I see a sense of humor and a sense of freedom in the work," said Tom McGovern, a vice president at Raleigh Studios. "I'm amazed at the similarities to our own popular culture." Not everyone, however, was surprised by the unconstrained, sometimes primitive, graffiti-like art on view (through Friday).

Rock singer Nash, a member of the band Crosby, Stills and Nash, said he had seen the "New Painters" work before.

"I saw this spirit when I was in Moscow last year playing a concert for the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War," said Nash, a friend of Stingray's.

"The art has an incredible amount of life to it; the same kind of energy that was happening in the '60s here in the music and the young people."

Clinnete Minnis, a senior at Beverly Hills High School, said the Soviet works "don't shock me at all. Artists all around the world are creative and feel the same things."

At least one person at the reception wasn't enamored with the art, however.

"I actually don't like it very much," said Lou Piatt, a Santa Monica businessman. "I don't really understand modern art."

Still, a positive critique came from collector Weisman, who specializes in Modern and Contemporary art. He said he plans to buy at least one work in the exhibit.

"You won't find this art at the Hermitage or Pushkin [major Soviet museums], but I like it and I'm very much interested in bringing the world together," said Weisman, part of whose collection is exhibited internationally.

Stingray confirmed that Weis-

man expressed interest in purchasing an artwork. Though elated by the news and generally pleased with Thursday's turnout, she said something was missing—the artists, who were unable to secure exit visas in time for the show.

"It just doesn't feel right that the artists aren't here. This is really for them because it's their art," Stingray said.

However, the videotapes Stingray made of the Soviet artists—which included revealing subtitle interviews—were the next best thing to personal appearances.

Said underground Soviet artist Victor Tsoi, 23, via tape: "I'm representative of my generation and in my work I'm probably expressing the experiences of my generation. . . . I guess everyone feels like he's in a cage, a psychological cage."

Said fellow-artist Afrika-Braev, 22: "I only do what I want to do and nothing else. I think this good."

And said Timor Novikov, the 30-year-old considered a leader of the "New Painters": "We are continuing the work of our ancestors. As to the development of art, the obstacles seem to grow fewer. We look ahead with joy in our eyes."

ALAN BERLINER