

# Electro-Punk Barto Is a Band With an Ideology

By [Sergey Chernov](#)

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Barto together with promoter and music journalist Artemy Troitsky (left).

ST. PETERSBURG — At a recent concert, electro-punk group Barto did not have a single copy of its new album “Intelligence, Conscience and Honor” — not because of a promotion failure, but due to a police investigation into one of the band’s songs for “signs of extremism” in its lyrics, a measure that pushed back the album’s release.

The song — called “Gotov,” or “Ready” — is a Bonnie and Clyde-influenced love story, says singer Maria Lyubicheva, about young revolutionaries, rather than criminals, who first meet each other at a rally. “I am ready — and are you ready to set cops’ cars on fire at night?” the chorus goes.

“They haven’t filed a criminal case — but at the same time, they didn’t say there wouldn’t be one. Everything has stalled, the expert probe is underway, and where it will all lead is not clear,” said Alexei Otradnov, the band’s lyricist and director.

“It’s difficult to comment. It’s not clear why it is all lasting for months, what the expert is actually doing with the lyric. I don’t know what someone can do with one line for 90 days.”

To avoid possible legal repercussions, the Moscow-based label Soyuz first considered taking the song off the album entirely, but the booklets with track listings had already been printed. Eventually, the vocal track was cut short just before the chorus and followed by an instrumental that the band had to record separately to make the track last the four minutes, 39 seconds listed in the booklet. The debacle caused the album to be delayed for weeks, but it is now out.

When Lyubicheva was asked to go to police in September, she was informed that two experts had already come to the “preliminary conclusion” that the line was “extremist.” The musicians believe, however, that the whole investigation was simply to take revenge for the band playing at an August rally in Moscow in defense of the Khimki forest that seemingly annoyed the authorities.

“It is obvious that they are looking for a scapegoat for the rally,” said keyboard player Yevgeny Kupriyanov. “The main questions they asked Maria were: ‘Who’s the organizer [of the rally]? Last names, first names ... They didn’t have much to go on.’”

The rally was one in a series of protests against the planned toll highway between Moscow and St. Petersburg to be built through the Khimki forest, backed by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The rally was held after workers had already begun cutting down trees.

The Moscow authorities authorized the rally — at which speeches were due to alternate with performances by bands — but as the date approached, they said no concert had been authorized. The police surrounded the site on Pushkin Square with cordons and metal detectors, seized the truck carrying the PA system, saying it had dirty license plates, and refused to let in musicians with musical instruments.

Only Barto and singer Yury Shevchuk of DDT managed to smuggle in guitars. To do so, the band had to scale the fence where it was not guarded by the OMON riot police. “The OMON stood where they were told to, but left parts of the fence unguarded,” Kupriyanov said.

Lyubicheva, whose views are often described as “left-wing,” insists that Barto is “not a political group.”

“So many people came. It was not a political rally with slogans like ‘Putin, Resign.’ It was only a concert, and for a good cause: ecology. But it still turned out like this. All the organizers were arrested early on, in the afternoon. It was not clear how to get to the rally; the policemen were shouting: ‘No entrance here! No entrance here!’”

Barto performed two songs with a guitar and two megaphones before Lyubicheva recited the song “Gotov” into a megaphone — it cannot be played on a guitar because of its dub rhythm.

“This is a song loved by our listeners because many identify themselves with it, but not in the sense that they will start setting cars on fire right away,” Lyubicheva said.

“But they have their kind of romanticism, they know this kind of lifestyle. We always play the song in concert, and we’re always asked to play it.”

Barto will play Ikra in Moscow on Friday.

Police are seeking a link between the case against art group Voina and the Barto song, Otradnov said.

Two Voina artists have been jailed for a stunt they dubbed “Palace Revolution” — dedicated to the upcoming police reform Medvedev announced earlier this year — when they overturned several police cars in September.

“As far as I know, [the arrested Voina members] were asked if they knew us, if their overturning of cars was connected to the song and so on,” Otradnov said.

“There’s an agenda to link all this into some conspiracy, which alarms us. It looks that there are some movements going on that we don’t yet understand.”

Barto started out in Moscow in 2006 as a duo of singer Maria Lyubicheva and lyricist Alexei Otradnov. But it has since expanded to include guitarist Ivan Deryabin and keyboard player Yevgeny Kupriyanov, who both live in St. Petersburg.

From the beginning, Barto has been about ideology, Lyubicheva says.

“We’re simply concerned about certain things, and we wanted to bring these issues to our friends and people around us,” she said.

“When we started out, everything was relatively good. There were years of stability and nobody cared about anything much. Even rock bands and some topical, non-commercial artists sang music without much content anyway. It was as if ‘everything is good, what can we sing about?’

“At the same time, we saw people descending into consumerism because loans were available, people had high salaries, everybody had a job and was buying things for themselves. We had had enough of it, and we made ‘Barto’ [the eponymous debut album].

“It dealt mainly with the consumer society on the one hand, and with the office theme on the other hand, because both Alexei and I were managers and knew it inside out. We didn’t like what was happening at all, how people plotted against each other to get a better job, how money was changing people cardinally. And how a boss who is paid \$30,000 a month doesn’t treat everybody else as people and is too mean to pay an extra 100 euros to an employee as a bonus.

“It was a completely crazy system, that kind of capitalism, which was totally unhealthy. It had no human face at all.”

Barto plays Friday at Ikra, at the Gogol Theater, 8A Ulitsa Kazakova. Metro Kurskaya. Tel. 778-5651, [nobullshit.ru/index.php](http://nobullshit.ru/index.php).

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