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Tiger Lillies Not Really Daytime Television Fun

By Sergei Chernov

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London's accordion-driven trio Tiger Lillies is known for songs that touch on bestiality and other taboo subjects.

ST. PETERSBURG — The Tiger Lillies, an accordion-driven Brechtian trio from London, are regular visitors to Russia and are set to play in Krasnoyarsk on Wednesday. Accordion player, guitarist and falsetto vocalist Martyn Jacques spoke to The Moscow Times.

You first came to Russia 10 years ago. What are your memories?

That gig, the first gig in St. Petersburg, has got to be one of the top five gigs of the Tiger Lillies ever. How we walked down the big staircase to the stage and looked at all the people there — it was amazing! It was one of my favorite gigs of all time. I loved it.

So you have established a long-term connection with Russia.

Yeah, and [our] song, "Russians," which I think is a great song. You know, "The Russians in

the market square." It was in Frankfurt, at the market. ... There were all these Russians selling off their old stuff. There was this guy who had a beautiful military coat, and he offered to sell it to me. It was a very cold day. I wouldn't buy it [off his back] because [of the cold]. Maybe he had more coats in the back, but it seemed symbolic to me that he was prepared to sell me his coat. I love that song.

Every song on one of your recent records, "Cockatoo Prison," is about a certain type of a criminal: "Molester of Minors," "Rapist," "Baby Killer." It's kind of a catalogue.

Yeah, it's kind of a catalogue of criminals and crimes. We [premiered] it in Australia, on a little island in the middle of Sydney Harbor. It was three nights, and it was brilliant. Really good fun.

You once said people often don't understand your lyrics and tend to develop their own ideas about your songs.

People very often misunderstand what songs are about. I remember some guy coming up to me in St. Petersburg — he was a right-wing football supporter, kind of a Nazi. Presumably, he supposed that I was a Nazi, too, though it's pretty obvious I am not, I think. But what's obvious for some is not obvious for everyone.

There was a classic Russian article in Moscow that said the Tiger Lillies were a neo-Nazi band and the bass player likes to wear dresses of dead prostitutes and everywhere in the world apart from Russia we play to an audience of 200 skinheads. It's just completely mad!

A friend of mine once said that if Russians understood what your songs were about, they would probably crucify you.

Sure. We seem to have more success in countries where English is not the first language. We play a lot in Germany, Greece, Austria, Russia, where people don't get it, they don't understand what we sing about. Maybe it's a good thing. Certainly in Germany, where we play in front of thousands of people — middle-aged, middle-class, respectable people. They think they came to see some kind of alternative, risque circus show. If they understood and analyzed the lyrics, they probably wouldn't want to see the show at all. The lyrics of my songs are quite heavy, quite offensive, quite dark. They probably wouldn't like them very much.

Have you ever had any problems because of your songs' subject matter?

Yeah, we've had quite a lot of trouble in Australia. They've seemed to get quite offended by us through the years. There were a few articles in Australia in which people complained about us. We had a lot of bad press there, and people were actually saying that we shouldn't be invited to play there and stuff.

They never put us on television in England or America. They make sure they won't allow us to become rich people. It's kind of controlled media in America and the U.K., anyway. When we go to Europe, we can play on television. But people who understand us, they're probably intelligentsia, they are not going to be bothered. The people who don't understand it would be offended — but they don't understand it, because English seems to be something that, I guess, educated, intelligent people speak in Europe. We go on national daytime television in

Greece, we've been on national daytime television in Russia. Nobody's bothered by us, because they don't understand what we're saying anyway.

Could you say a few words about your most recent show and album "Here I am Human!"?

For me, the show is about good and evil, God and the devil, and then the reversal of good and evil, turning things upside down. It's about religion, about the church. In the show, there's a character who is God and another who is the devil. I am the devil in the show. So I'm evil, am I? What is evil about me? What is good about you, God? Is God really good? Is the devil really bad?

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