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Nick Cave and Grinderman Debut in Moscow

By Alexander Bratersky

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Australian singer Nick Cave, left, with his group, Grinderman. The name is inspired by the blues song “Grinder Man’s Blues’ by Memphis Slim.

Nick Cave brings his dark emotional ballads and his Grinderman band to Moscow for the first time this Saturday as they play Crocus City Hall.

Cave has an almost cult-like stature in Russia, making a notable appearance — in name at least — way back in the Soviet era in the 1987 cult film "Assa," starring Viktor Tsoi.

"This is Nick Cave, my beloved singer," Malchik Bananan, or Banana Boy, said in a scene in the movie, showing a picture of the musician to his girlfriend. "He is a god."

Adding to Cave's appeal was the success with his book "And the Ass Saw the Angel," about a troubled mute boy and his abusive family, which was translated by the celebrated late poet and critic Ilya Kormiltsev.

Cave and Grinderman will play as part of a world tour to support the acclaimed new album "Grinderman 2."

"Nick Cave explores the male psyche with force and humor," reads a recent New Yorker magazine review of the album.

The band has only been playing with Cave for five years, but as they are the same musicians who made up part of the Bad Seeds, there is a long history and a knowledge of one another that can be seen even when they rehearse, said legendary drummer and percussion player Jim Sclavunos.

"We improvise a lot in the studio. It is like in modern jazz, when you can go to any direction, there's no guidelines. You can't control things, even if you want to," Sclavunos said in a phone interview. "You let the energy flow and you being carried along with that flow."

Known for songs that combine punk, cabaret and even elements of folk music, Cave formed Grinderman in 2006, explaining in one interview that the band was created as a "way to escape the weight of the Bad Seeds."

Sclavunos recalled how he first met the legendary musician in the 1980s in the United States where he found him sitting in a hotel garbage bin, entertaining people around him with his jokes.

"He doesn't remember it, but my eyes didn't deceive me. He looked very comfortable," Sclavunos said.

Cave once said he preferred the northern capital, telling a local reporter that he felt like a "Dostoevsky character" while visiting St. Petersburg in 2008.

"It was one of the best nights in my life," Cave said at that time. He added that he wanted to come to the city again "incognito."

That won't happen this time, as both his concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg are sold out — although touts were still selling tickets on the Internet.

"I love both cities, but Moscow is most exciting since it has a nervous energy which reminds me of New York," Sclavunos said.

Nick Cave and Grinderman play July 2 at 7 p.m. Crocus City Hall, 65-66 kilometer of the Moscow Ring Road. Metro Myakininskaya. Tel. (499) 550-0055, www.crocus-hall.ru.

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