

Photographer's Kino 'Chronicles' Released

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ST. PETERSBURG — As St. Petersburg marked what would have been the 50th birthday of Kino frontman Viktor Tsoi last week, photographer Natasha Vassilieva-Hull presented her new book, "Kinokhroniki iz Podpolya" ("Kinochronicles from the Underground.")

The book is the biggest collection of Kino photos that has ever been published and the first time a Russian publishing house, Eksmo, has agreed to collaborate with a designer from the United Kingdom.

Vassilieva-Hull spoke about the book and her life in the 1980s at a presentation at a bookshop on Nevsky Prospekt. She left Russia in 1994 for Britain, becoming the first Russian photographer to shoot The Rolling Stones at Wembley Arena.

Vassilieva-Hull was a key figure in the Leningrad music scene, the founder and editor of underground magazine Rocksy and one of the people behind the Leningrad Rock Club.

Under Soviet rule, this led to trips to the police station after concerts, no money (she was once paid with a jar of honey and a pair of white jeans) and constant pressure from the authorities.

Vassilieva-Hull first met Tsoi in 1983 at a mutual friend's birthday party. She photographed him for the first time soon afterwards, and they became good friends.

A teen idol and the number one rock star in the late Soviet Union, Tsoi formed Kino in 1982. According to legend, Boris Grebenshchikov, frontman of Akvarium, then Russia's most popular rock band, first spotted Tsoi when he was singing on a train.

The real breakthrough for the group came in 1987, with the success of their album "Gruppa Krovi" (Blood Group) and two cult films, "Assa" (1987) and "Iгла" (The Needle) (1988). Tsoi, however, remained unchanged by fame, said music journalist and critic Artyom Troitsky. He was a "silent loner, an almost Byronic but modern day romantic soul and rock 'n' roll drive, something like a cross between James Dean and Bruce Lee."

In the book, Vassilieva-Hull has compiled pictures of Kino taken with her Zenit camera during a period of nine years, from 1982 to 1990. The book is a treasure trove of unique photographs taken at rehearsals, backstage and at house parties. Kept from the public for more than 20 years, and coupled with Vassilieva-Hull's informal, witty comments, the collection elicits an impression of intimacy, as though readers are looking through a family album.

"Kinokhroniki iz Podpolya" by Natasha Vassilieva-Hull (118 pages) is published by Eksmo and has a recommended price of 550 rubles (\$16.50).

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