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DJ Kraviz Feted All Over Europe, but Not in Russia

By Alec Luhn

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A former dentist, Nina Kraviz used to DJ at Moscow club Propaganda. She will DJ at Ibiza club Space this fall. **Alec Luhn**

FERROPOLIS, Germany — Nina Kraviz doesn't scream for ice cream, she asks for it with a wink and a smile.

But on a recent summer evening, the DJ and producer wasn't happy about her two scoops in the VIP area of Germany's Melt! music festival, which were delivered with a wafer rather than a waffle.

"Where's the waffle?" she asked with a puppy-dog frown.

Kraviz's willowy beauty and flirty demeanor might lead some to write her off as a pin-up DJ, but that would be to ignore her sensual, minimalistic style of music. From her humble beginnings as a teenager listening to electronic music late at night over the radio in Irkutsk,

this former dentist has become one of Europe's most hotly tipped house music producers this year with a critically acclaimed debut album, a cover story in DJ Mag and a schedule of marquee performances throughout the EU.

On her self-titled album, Kraviz impressed reviewers with her vocal stylings and subtle arrangements, as well as references to classic house music: the lead single "Ghetto Kraviz" and other tracks pay clear homage to the genre of ghetto house with slow-burning, unadorned beats and sexually charged lyrics.

The sensual new disc was inspired by a romantic relationship, as well as her own wanderlust, Kraviz said. When asked what inspires her creativity in general, she replied, "Men, of course; loneliness, meeting different people, suffering sometimes, getting what I want and not getting what I want."

But doesn't Kraviz, who was once named by Time Out magazine as one of the 50 most beautiful people in Moscow, always get what she wants?

"In my private life I don't really get what I want that much, and then I leave," she said, after a pause. Although she likes touring, it makes relationships nearly impossible, she explained.

Kraviz used to DJ every Friday at the venerable Moscow club Propaganda, but now she comes home to her apartment near metro station Mayakovskaya only about once a month, she said. Since she put out her album on the London label Rekids in February, her profile has risen dramatically abroad. That same month, Kraviz became the first Russian to be featured on the cover of the London-based DJ Mag (in a suggestive black bodysuit), and she did the May 12 guest mix for BBC Radio 1's long-running program Essential Mix.

After a summer full of festivals and club appearances across Europe, Kraviz will play sets this fall at the landmark Ibiza club Space, as well as gigs in the United States, UK, Switzerland and Italy. Onstage, Kraviz frequently interacts with the audience and takes the microphone to perform the vocals for her own songs live.

"I think in Europe she is one of the most popular Russian DJs," said German DJ and producer Douglas Greed (real name Mario Willms), who first met Kraviz at the educational event Red Bull Music Academy in 2006.

"As a producer, Kraviz immediately stands out just because she has such an original sound," said Berlin-based music journalist, DJ and producer Philip Sherburne in an e-mail interview. "She takes elements of classic Chicago and New York house and puts her own spin on them, particularly by her use of vocals."

Greed praised the unique "darkness and sexiness" of Kraviz's tracks.

Kraviz grew up in Irkutsk, staying up into the wee hours to tape late-night radio programming from Moscow and listening to American house and techno music pioneers like Armando and Jeff Mills.

After completing a degree in dentistry in Moscow, she went into practice and later worked at a veterans' hospital. Meanwhile, she was moonlighting as a music writer at magazines like Ptyuch and Afisha. In 2003, she quit her hospital job and began DJing.

A turning point in her career came in 2006 when she attended Red Bull Music Academy in Melbourne, Australia, where she studied with DJ and producer Matt Edwards. Since 2009, she has released several 12-inches on Edwards' London-based label Rekids, as well as her new full-length.

Kraviz has never released on a Russian label. She voiced many complaints with the Russian electronic music scene — and Russia in general — including rampant sexism, jealousy and a "deeply retro" belief in the necessity of personal connections.

"In the rest of the world, people know who I am, but in my own country, nobody gives a [expletive] who I am," she said.

Strange emotions and inner conflicts are what fuel her creativity, she said, describing how she sometimes reflects on things late at night while singing into a kind of digital echo chamber.

"Imagine you see a girl who's lying on her floor at home ... Imagine her turning on a mic, playing some keys and listening to her voice going through some effects," Kraviz said. "Just lie on the floor, and you can hear her voice; it goes into infinity."

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