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Music of Korolenko Defies Classification

By Daniel Kozin

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Psoy Korolenko is set to perform as part of a duo with St. Petersburg-based pianist and composer Alyona Alenkova this Friday at Dusche club, in a concert dedicated to their upcoming album "Russian Riches. Volume II."

That much is known. How else to describe the enigmatic artistic persona of Korolenko to those unfamiliar with his work is a challenge, as the artist defies categorization or comparison.

Variously described as a wandering scholar, the chief postmodern troll of the Russian Internet and a shaman journalist, among equally eclectic epithets, Korolenko's performances are characterized by a variety of subject matters, musical styles and even languages.

Describing himself as a "one-man cabaret inspired by early 20th-century popular songs, traditional Klezmer music, French chanson, Soviet popular songs and the Russian bard tradition, with experiments in rap and other genres," he strongly shuns the title that may seem most natural in describing his work.

"My music is not eclectic, in that it always follows a certain logic and conveys a very specific meaning that I find important," he said in a telephone interview with The St. Petersburg Times ahead of his local gig.

His fluid use of genre is complemented by lyrics in Russian, English, French and Yiddish, in addition to Italian, German and any other language he deems fit to express his artistic vision. Though to the untrained ear it may sound confusing, this multilingualism has a very specific purpose.

"The audience will usually pick up on the two primary languages, Russian and English, which express the content, and I add a third decorative language such as Yiddish to spell the meaning that is conveyed, rather than stating it. It adds an additional level of understanding out of ambivalence, being both serious and light, old and new, like an electric current that creates polarity.

"I strive to illustrate the wide range of meanings, values and feelings that exist in every person. This is an appeal to contradictory tastes, not only among the audience, but also in any given audience member, who represents not only their own tastes, but also those of their parents, their culture and previous generations."

Rhyming and rearranging syllables across languages allows him to create wordplay that delves deeper into the semantic meaning of concepts, accompanied by the light and minimalist synthesizer that is his instrument of choice.

"My goal is to bring people with very different views together to feel united by emphasizing differences; this is a way to bring peace," he said.

The gig at Dusche represents a Moscow-Petersburg alliance of sorts. The music was created mostly by St. Petersburg-based Alenkova, who will play piano in the duo.

Psoy Korolenko will perform together with Alyona Alenkova at 8 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 5 at Dusche, 50 Ligovsky Prospekt. Tel. +7 (960) 246 4550.

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