The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia's Folk Music Scene Defies Commercial Logic

By Inna Kiyasova

October 28, 2013



Russian music is often stereotyped as being highly commercialized, lacking deep lyrics and sounds. Not many people know that Russia can also boast of a hidden side to its music.

The 1990s were a difficult decade for many Russians and yet they also witnessed a flourishing music scene. Technologies evolved, and it became possible to achieve high-quality sound and create something truly new.

''Theodor Bastard,'' which will end their Russian tour in St. Petersburg on Nov. 3, is a well-known Russian "world music" band also enjoying some success in Europe. The band, which started in 1996 in St. Petersburg, has been a regular on the European festival circuit and collaborated with famous world artists, such as Peter Christopherson from Coil, and Martin Atkins, who played with Nine Inch Nails, Ministry and Killing Joke.

''Theodor Bastard'' consists of five musicians who transform their concerts into a magical act

that sends listeners on a journey through various folk traditions. Musicians use multiple electronic devices and ethnic percussion instruments such as the darbuka, ashiq, jambi, chinese flute and even some more standard instruments like cello, saxophone and a harp, connecting with the amazing voice of Yana Veva, the vocalist.

"We enjoy when people dance at our concerts," said Fedor Svoloch, the frontman of the band, during a Moscow concert held Sunday in Club B2. However, their music is more contemplative than dance-oriented.

''Majdanek Waltz'' is one of the most remarkable projects on the Russian post-industrial and dark-folk scene, formed in December 2001 when they released their first single. In the beginning, the band was purely a studio project, yet their first concert was held in 2004. According to the band's website, their music is about "catching a certain mood, when so-called 'reality' can no longer prevail and really important things come to the fore: the chill of a hangover, a gloomy summer day, a storm over the lake." Inspired by Anna Akhmatova, Miguel Serrano, Hans Erich Nossack and other writers and poets, ''Majdanek Waltz'' share their "aesthetics of nonexistence" and claim to not care about commerce and fame.

The Russian neofolk band ''Moon Far Away'' from Arkhangelsk, created in 1994, prefer to hide their faces behind masks during concerts and photo shoots. The debut album, "Lado World," was released in 1997 and was recognized by Russian and foreign critics as the first truly gothic Russian release ever. ''Moon Far Away'' defines their own style as "ritual neofolk," whatever that means. In interviews the band's leader has described their style as influenced by contemporary European gothic music, from which the band took sounds as well as technology advances, and on the other hand is also influenced by the Russian folk music tradition and North Russian folklore. They also made a cover for ''Theodor Bastard's'' song "Budu Zhit" and also are well-known in Scandinavian countries.

For those who are hungry for more, there is a chance to hear the special, unusual sound of "Moon Far Away" in November, as they perform in Moscow on Nov. 14.

Contact the author at i.kiyasova@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/10/28/russias-folk-music-scene-defies-commercial-logic-a29003