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Estonian Composer Begins Russian Tour

By Sergey Chernov

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"I love music that offers the listener a chance to freely interpret, and that's why I find instrumentals attractive," says Argo Vals, guitarist and composer from Estonia.

Argo Vals, an acclaimed guitarist and composer from Tartu, Estonia, whose complex musical ideas and advanced guitar technique has seen him compared to King Crimson legend Robert Fripp, will soon perform in Moscow. The 26-year-old, whose recordings can be heard in a number of movies, TV shows and dance performances, released his debut album, "Tsichier," in 2012, while February 2014 saw the release of his two new singles, "24" and "Oxymoron." Vals spoke to The Moscow Times ahead his nine-date Russian tour, which begins Friday in St. Petersburg and ends in Moscow on Aug. 26.

Q: Tell us a little about your upcoming Russian tour.

A: This tour is the first I've done so far. Alex Kelman, who manages concerts and tours by different bands in Russia, saw my live performance at this year's "Tallinn Music Week" in March, was impressed and interested in bringing me to play in front of a Russian audience, so he contacted my manager.

Q: Will you play solo and use electronic equipment as well as a guitar?

A: Yes, I'll play solo. I love the sound of a guitar, but I also like it to sound like something else at some points — that's the reason for using electronic equipment. I've done live-electronics concerts since 2008 and find the atmosphere it creates to be very attractive and interesting. Making this kind of music is also kind of a therapy session for both me and the listeners. The live-electronics set includes elements of progressivity, minimalism, ambient, rock, jazz and metal.

Q: What were the ideas behind your most recent releases?

A: My latest releases are "Oxymoron" and "24." I released them as a double single. Because the music is instrumental, I felt that releasing two songs at once would have a bigger effect and they fit together quite well. I made the first version of "Oxymoron" for a television documentary at first, which was about different voluntary jobs under the one work exchange program. There were about three or four versions made of this song and that helped a lot with developing it. The drum beat of "24" haunted me for some years before I decided to start composing the song. The final result of "24" is even closer to my ideals.

Q: When did you first become interested in music? What are your influences?

A: I started making music as early as four years old, when I sang in a choir. Also I had a synthesizer made for children at home, which I often played for hours. Music caught my attention and I wanted to focus on it. The turning point was when I discovered rock-influenced music. I was 12 then. Bands like the Deftones, Korn, Sevendust, Nirvana and The Prodigy hit me like a big wave. I started writing simple instrumental songs using a guitar and finally formed a band where I was a guitarist and composer at the same time — I was 15 then. Although I hadn't attended a music school before, the idea of being a musician made my heart pound from excitement and grew to be my biggest interest. I have since gone on to study music, create many different bands such as Animal Drama, Viljandi Guitar Trio, Talamak, Rob Findel and the Argo Vals Band (to name a few) as well as compose for many diverse acts and groups since 2006.

Q: Did you ever try to write songs with lyrics or was instrumental music your idea from the very start?

A: I love music that offers the listener a chance to freely interpret, and that's why I find instrumental music more attractive than working on music with lyrics.

I have played in bands that have a vocalist — Animal Drama is my favorite — but I have always felt that expressing myself without using any words may affect myself and the audience even more.

Q: What is the future of music? Is it in a combination of traditional instruments and modern technologies, or is it something else?

A: Musical genres and the use of different instruments are going to be combined even more. There aren't any rules, but it is elementary to have a good taste in mixing things. And of course there are trends even in music, which takes old things and gives it new life. The more

music there is, the more smashed up everything will be and the more difficult it will be for a musician or a businessman to build their audiences.

I hope the physical forms, such as vinyls and CDs don't disappear completely. Vinyls have had their comeback in some sense, which is cool.

Argo Vals will perform Aug. 26 at 8 p.m. at Shestnadtsat Tonn. 6 Presnensky Val. Metro Ulitsa 1905 Goda. 499-253-5300.

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