

The 5 Most Legendary Western Artists to Ever Perform in Moscow

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October 29, 2015



American pop star Michael Jackson performs on stage during his concert at Moscow's Dinamo stadium on Sept. 17, 1996.

This year on Moscow's City Day, Muscovites and visitors flocked to a central square and watched an Aerosmith concert. Nowadays, Russians — and especially residents of Moscow — are nonchalant about concerts of famous foreign musicians, but a couple of decades ago seeing and hearing AC/DC, the Scorpions or ex-Beatle Paul McCartney was possible only in music lovers' wildest dreams.

To look back to the days when the world's greatest rock stars first performed for Soviet and Russian audiences, we asked the people who were there to remember what it was like.

1989: Moscow Music Peace Festival

The Soviet Union was slowly disappearing from the maps of the world, there were just four

years before tanks would be aimed at the White House in Moscow and the era of New Russia was on its way.

The iron curtain began to fall with the first rock music festival what was still the U.S.S.R. — the Moscow Music Peace Festival at "Luzhniki" stadium in Moscow on Aug. 12–13, 1989. Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe, Ozzy Osbourne, Scorpions, Cinderella, Skid Row and Gorky Park played on stage at this "Russian Woodstock" for about 200,000 people, while nearly 60 countries all around the world broadcast the festival live.

"I was five years old and went there with my parents, who were still young and cool," said Yuri Garnaev.

"My favorite band was Bon Jovi, so I was waiting for them and shaking my father's hand, just asking one question: 'When? When will Bon Jovi finally appear?' I only now realize what great bands I listened to and what a wonderful time it was," he said.

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1991: Monsters of Rock

A month after the August coup attempt, a concert at Moscow's Tushino airfield was the last gig in the worldwide Monsters of Rock festival, which was held in Great Britain, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary and at the end — Russia [then formally still the Soviet Union]. Since it was free, people came from all over the country to take part in this historic event. Two years after the Moscow Music Peace Festival and the crowds were much bigger — from 600,000 to a million people, depending on the source.

Superstars of the world's rock scene — Metallica, AC/DC, Pantera and The Black Crowes — drove the audience crazy. There was an ocean of young and old, men and women; hundreds of Russian, American and Confederate flags. People believed that good things were on the way to their country, and they were ready to hear music that they had no access to for many years.

Dmitry Bravy, who is working on a book about AC/DC remembers this festival as "the Tushino booze-a-thon: drunk and dirty people with flags everywhere."

"But the sound was so perfect that it turned you inside out!" he said.

"Sadly, it all ended with people throwing glass bottles, so I had to watch out and protect my head," said another concert-goer, Vladimir Syaplin.

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1997: The Prodigy

The really popular album "The Fat of The Land" by The Prodigy, British electronic monsters, was released in 1997 and did not pass Russia by. In 1997 about 200,000 people plodded through autumn's chill, puddles and aggressive police to rave at The Prodigy's free concert at Manezh Square right next to Red Square.

Today when the musicians come to Russia, they always remember it as one of the best gigs they ever had.

"In the summer of 1997, I was on vacation at a summer camp on the Black Sea. My mother knew that I loved the band, and when I got back she said, "Here's some good news for you! They're coming to Moscow in late September and will be performing at Manezh Square." My happiness had no bounds," remembers Sergei Chernyshev.

"I, a 14-year-old boy, and two friends of mine went to the most important event in our lives. We got to the square at 11 a.m., and we couldn't believe it! So many people... When The Prodigy came on people went crazy. It was a jumbled mass of people: punks, rappers, rockers, ravers, moms and dads with their children — everyone chanted, sang and danced. It's been many years, but every time I pass that place, I see the scene in my mind's eye," he said.

Unfortunately, not everyone came home after the concert.

Sergei Ushkov lost a friend: "I wasn't there, but my friend was crushed in the crowd and died. He was 17."

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1999: Red Hot Chili Peppers

Close to the Millennium, the Russian MTV channel celebrated its first birthday on Sept. 25, 1999. To mark the event, they invited Red Hot Chili Peppers to play in the heart of Moscow.

This was after their album "Californication" had come out and they'd played at Woodstock-99, where the band unintentionally caused massive riots with their song "Fire."

Despite all this, the band came to Moscow and showed its best at Red Square.

"The crowd was always moving, the camera swept over us on special cranes, and nobody paid any attention to the rain," shared RHCP fan Dmitry Kanadets.

"I went home feeling like it was one of the most important moments in my life. Afterwards, I started playing bass guitar in different bands. And of course I didn't miss their concerts in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 2012. I went with my girlfriend and a week later we got married," he said.

"I don't remember almost anything except the OMON officers and what they were doing. The most amazing thing that shocked me [in a positive way] was how people helped each other while police caused the stampeding. If you fell, someone helped you instantly. This fraternal solidarity is the one thing that I remember clearly," said another fan, Yekaterina Nedzvetskaya.

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2003: Paul McCartney

In 2003, Vladimir Putin was the president of a country not under sanctions and the world's judgment. Musician Andrei Makarevich, now a critic of Russian policies, was sitting near the president. And everyone on Red Square was singing "Hey Jude" and other famous songs written by The Beatles and frontman Sir Paul McCartney, who was performing in Moscow for the very first time.

"This is my youth again!" said a middle-aged woman as she danced during the concert. "I never thought I would be listening to him here in Moscow."

"This hand shook Paul's," a stunned fan told TVS television, after meeting McCartney before the concert. "I'm not going to wash it for several days."

To find out more about the concert, read this story published 12 years ago: [Paul McCartney Finally Back in the U.S.S.R.](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/10/29/the-5-most-legendary-western-artists-to-ever-perform-in-moscow-a50552)

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