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‘I Am the Enemy of the State’: Russian Rapper Compares Russia to Prison Camp

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Face / Wikicommons

Russian rapper Ivan Dremin, better known by his stage name, Face, has stirred controversy this week with the release of a new politically charged album that compares Russia to a “prison camp.”

Dremin, 21, achieved popularity in 2017 after his music video "Burger" gained over 30 million views on Youtube. His new album, “Mysterious Ways,” represents a departure from his previous, mostly apolitical, music by tackling social issues that are making headlines in Russia, including poverty, corruption and prison torture.

Link:
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In the album’s opening track, called “Stolen Air,” Face echoes the words of Soviet poet Osip

Mandelstam — a victim of Soviet repression: “We live without sensing the country under our feet."

Corruption is a returning theme throughout the album’s eight tracks. In “The Fourth Horseman,” Dremin refers to the fire that engulfed the Winter Cherry shopping mall in Kemerovo in March 2018. The national tragedy, which claimed 64 lives, including 41 children, has been widely blamed on corruption.

“Our life sort of resembles a shopping mall: Someone burns in it while someone else is making money on interest.”

In the same track, Dremin raps:

“My country is one big prison camp,

Anywhere I go, I feel right at home.”

In “Our mentality,” in which the rapper calls himself “the enemy of the state,” he raps about the improvidence of life in modern Russia:

“Our mentality is [playing] slot machines

Our mentality is paycheck to paycheck.

Our mentality is not paying for our crib.

Even if the lights are out, we don’t give a f***.”

Related article: Russians Demonstrate in Outpouring of Grief After Kemerovo Fire

The album has received praise from listeners online, including accolades from prominent Russian rapper Oxxxymiron. Meanwhile, the news outlet Znak described the release as a “big political event for the country.”

Other listeners, including the editor-in-chief of the Storona music magazine, Nadezha Samodurova, have questioned Dremin’s sincerity in choosing to rap on political issues.

“It is possible that rapping about politics is becoming a trend... But when it comes to Dremin, I don’t believe that he really means it,” she was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, critics have noted that Dremin’s new album is part of a wider trend of young Russian artists speaking out on political topics.

“The youth is not afraid of the authorities and they now vocalize the things they want to change in the country,” Artemy Troitsky, a renowned music critic, told The Moscow Times.

“Dremin, a 21 year old rapper from Ufa, in many ways represents this discontent in his music.”

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