RED WAVE

An American in the Soviet Music Underground

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By Joanna Stingray & Madison Stingray

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◆ DEDICATIONS ◆

I am forever grateful to Boris Grebenshchikov, for helping to make me who I am and for giving me a purpose at a very naive, young age. I was blessed to be taken under his wing and to have his warmth fuel my own work and love.

Viktor Tsoi, one of the truest friends one could hope to have in life. His honesty, his laughter, his kindness are always within me. His wings will forever hug the sun over St. Petersburg.

Sergey Kuryokhin, my "Capitán," my "papa," who inspired me to live life with a fire in my bones and to push boundaries. He taught me to not be afraid of the universe and the big dreams that come out of it.

All my cultural *tovarishees*, thank you for showing me true freedom and filling my heart and soul with the most magnificent colors. You surrounded me with fun, creativity and love that overwhelmed and inspired me. *MIR and Rock'n Roll!!*

Contents

◆ INTRODUCTION ◆

I still remember the day I fell down the rabbit hole. It was April 1984, and I had just landed at Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow. Everywhere I looked, it was dark, cold, and lifeless, and walking through the concrete halls I felt empty and tense. It seemed like I was walking forever, farther and farther from home and the palm trees that had been the bookmarks to my life.

I arrived at the customs area with long lines of grim people waiting their turn silently. Everywhere I looked there were motionless soldiers, more like mannequins or stuffed bears than real people. Were they even breathing? Was I? I inhaled. On my tongue, the cigarette smoke mixed with the warm odor of a hundred bodies packed together.

The next three days that followed, I was still falling. Moscow out of the bus window was a grey and sullen ghost, yet full of life. People in black or dark blue raced through the city streets. I remember thinking that this was a place to which I would never come back, an evil empire of despair behind the Iron Curtain. My father, for what felt like the first time, was right.

On the fourth day, I arrived in Leningrad to more monotonous views of a drab country. The dirty glass of the bus made it feel like a moving prison, the rote history from the watchful guide like the morning prayers for a flock of fallen angels. During an afternoon break back at the 'tourist' hotel I decided I had had enough, and through a maze of maneuvers I landed at the feet of the father of 'underground' Russian rock 'n roll, the magical Boris Grebenshchikov. I remember being in his apartment, and he was this real person in front of me with color in his eyes and his cheeks. I was listening to Russian rock, this crazy soundtrack to life and love and loss, and I felt it – I had finally arrived in my Wonderland.

From that moment, my whole life changed. I found myself in Leningrad's underground rock music and art scene, a chaotic, captivating world – a piece of

the Soviet Union tucked away like a heart beneath the ribs. From the moment I met Boris and all the other creative pirates, I was hooked on this place that turned misery into music and suffering into song. The next four years of my life I spent continent-hopping across the Atlantic, alternating one week in that enchanted land of contradictions and fairy tales with three months in Los Angeles trying to claw my way back.

All that creative energy and powerful emotion drove me to want to share Leningrad's beautiful music and art with the West. I smuggled out my friends' music and released a double album titled *Red Wave – Four Underground Bands from the U.S.S.R.* "Music has no borders" became my mantra.

As I fell head over heels into the crazy tea party, in love with the guys, the city, and the country as well, I found a way to warm the coldness on the streets of communist Russia, to peel back the masks to see expressions of individuality and life. It was clear to me that the reason these musicians could be so creative and artistic was because they had nothing else to do to distract them. The American dream had been abandoned for sitting in front of the television like a vegetable in a microwavable dinner, but in the Soviet Union these guys still had to make up their own dreams to entertain themselves.

By 1987, the U.S.S.R. was in the thick of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and it was unclear what the final destination culturally would be. By that time, I had become a hero to the Russian youth and an enemy of the Russian state, had my visa blocked and my wedding missed, been questioned by both the FBI and the KGB. But by the end of that year, I had somehow managed to marry Yuri Kasparyan, and Gorbachev had managed to divorce himself from the chains of the old guard. The dramatic changes left everything and everyone, including me, waiting to see what would happen next.

What scared me was that in Mother Russia, the one thing that never changes is the unpredictability of what's to come.

For a dozen years, from April 1984 through April 1996, I was obsessed with Wonderland and its people, who infused the city with an electricity even when the power would inadvertently cut out. I tried to spend as much time as I could soaking it all in, until the rabbit hole would spit me out and close, seemingly forever. The following story is my own recollection of those experiences in Russia, occasionally supported by press articles and some of the many taped interviews I conducted during those times, and my memories of all the adventures that I got to share with the most wonderful cast of characters.

◆ 1984–1987 ◆

◆ The Truth About Communism

I was six or seven years old when my dad turned to me and said, "Don't ever, ever go behind the Iron Curtain."

I have vivid memories from the mid-'60s of him sitting in his warm, woodsy office making a movie, a documentary called *The Truth About Communism* that he wrote, directed, and produced. It consumed his life for three or four years – splicing and dicing reels and reels of film, cutting, taping, and throwing remnants on the floor like empty bags of potato chips. He was extremely passionate about the U.S.S.R., with Ronald Reagan at his back narrating the film and making one of his first public statements against the Evil Empire as then-Governor of California. *The Truth About Communism* became a well-known anti-communist propaganda piece in the late 1970s, shown at high schools around the country, including mine. I believed my dad, his voice sticking in the back of my mind for years like a little alarm clock hidden under a pile of pillows.

Yet at that time, Russia still wasn't a real part of my life. I spent my early years in Topanga Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains, traipsing through the hills and biking to school or following my mom as she dragged me and my sisters to every musical that came through Los Angeles. She divorced my father when I was twelve years old, moving us to a rented duplex in Beverly Hills on the wrong side of the nicest theoretical railroad tracks in the world, where palm fronds littered the overgrown yard and the hum of Wilshire Boulevard came down from the north. It was a block from Beverly Hills High School, the center of my thoughts in those days. Government corruption, impossibly

long food lines, and KGB intimidation? I was more concerned with my big feathery hair, ditching classes, and stealing as many frozen brownies from my best friend's fridge as I could fit in my stomach.

Besides my father, my only exposure to Russia came from a class I loved on Russian history. In the late 1970s, the State Department endorsed educational exchanges with the U.S.S.R., and one incredible teacher of mine took it upon himself to plan a week-long trip there over winter break. My best friend Diana was going, and I was desperate to join her, in part because I knew how much it would piss off my Communist-hating father and in part because I didn't want to be left out of any adventure. My mom worked a ton of extra hours like always to try to send me on the field trip, but in the end I was back in the duplex while everyone else boarded a plane and was swept away, leaving me with my bike and such a severe disappointment that I wouldn't forget that feeling for years.

I was lucky enough that I didn't have to wait to go to Russia to get my first exposure to rock 'n roll. My high school boyfriend, Paul, introduced me to the music that David Bowie called "dangerous" and "darker than ourselves." It was the only thing that could eclipse all of my egocentric problems and teenage angst and make me feel like there was power in the world that could sway even the tallest of giants. Paul was a ticket scalper – a tall, street-smart guy paying a bunch of strange characters to camp out in line for days to buy the best seats. I sat in the front row for David Bowie, The Rolling Stones, Alice Cooper, Elton John, and Paul McCartney & Wings, to name a few. I loved every hot and heavy night pressed against the stage, feeling the music shake the hoops in my ears, and I was absolutely crazy about Bowie. There was something about his charisma, his side-eye glances and sultry shrugs, and the way he shone in metallic like some sort of fallen angel. He made me want to perform, made me believe that it was something worth living.

The first band I joined was managed by my friend Jeff Smith, who'd collected a group of decent musicians with dirty hair and cheerful eyes. Standing at the front with an oversized microphone and silly curly hair, I was a typical high school singer who could belt like a caribou and couldn't stay in tune; I had the look, I had tons of energy, but I also had no idea what I was doing.

Jeff's father, Joe, ran Capitol Records. Back then it was the big time, a dizzying thirteen-story tower on Hollywood Boulevard and Vine that loomed over the tourists and wannabee sweethearts with its big sign and disinterested attitude. Jeff lived in a big house on Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills, and we'd go over there to practice inside the ivy and brick. His father came into the 'smoking room' to hear us bang around and jump up and down like we were the big hits on tour already – talk about putting your father into

■ My father Sidney Fields and Alexander Kerensky filming *The Truth about Communism*, early 1960s.

an awkward position! We were barely good enough to play at our high school talent show, but Jeff dragged his father in as if his dad was supposed to sign us right then and there.

Joe, to his credit, sat through whatever terrible song we had decided to play and just kept nodding along in time. At the end he looked up and said, "You know what kids? You just have to keep practicing. If you want it badly enough, you'll keep at it and you'll get better and better."

It was the first time I'd ever received constructive criticism as an artist, if you could call me that. I really took it to heart, holding it with me as I bounced around college and sang in the tiny moldy shower stalls that plagued the quintessential American dorm buildings. I went to USC on a diving scholarship, then to Boston University for a change of pace, where the cold stoked a fire under me to transfer back to UCLA and finish out my degree in the land of perpetual summer and smog. If you'd have told me then I'd spend over a decade of my life bundled up against the Siberian cold, I would have told you that you couldn't pay me enough money.

In the summer of 1981, during my stint at UCLA, I went to work at a clothing store. Admittedly, that was not remotely close to what Joe had in mind when he'd encouraged me to practice singing. Within days I was bored out of my mind, locked into a monotonous routine of work: eat, sleep…work, eat, sleep. I decided then and there that I would never ever have a regular 9-to-5 job. However hard I needed to practice, however many notes I had to crack and sharps I had to sing, I would do it.

Within weeks, my best friend and I decided that we should try to start another band.

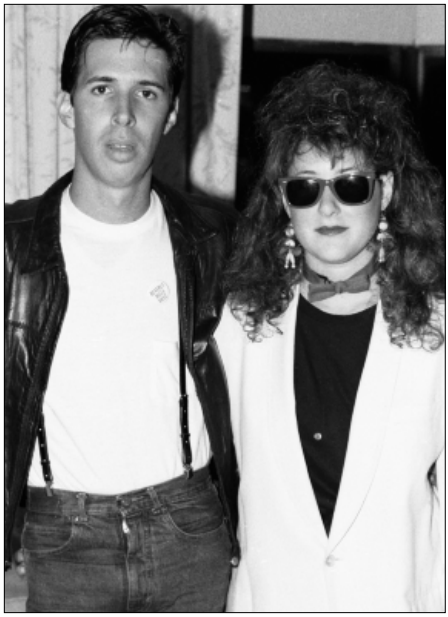
The Go-Go's were an all-girl group from Los Angeles who had become famous, so we figured, in that typical La-La-Land daydream, that we could be too. We decided that she'd learn the guitar and I'd sing. I also wanted to write music, like Bowie, which is no small feat if you can't play an instrument very well. I struggled through it, crumpled copious amounts of paper, but I did manage a couple of brainless, youthful songs called "Beverly Hills Brat" and "Boys, They're My Toys."

In my mind, this was it. I wanted to quit college and be a rock 'n roll star. My mom was remarried to an incredible self-made lawyer, real estate developer, art collector, and well-known philanthropist. Both of them saw my plans as at the very least, idiotic and at the very worst, self-destructive. My mom's face went sheet-white as she stared at me and asked, "Do you have any idea how lucky you are that your stepfather is paying for you to get an education?" She threatened to cut me off if I didn't finish my degree, so with no better option I stuck with it. In the back of my mind, though, I was going to be a rockstar.

I slogged through class and procrastinated by writing songs. By the time I graduated in 1983, I had a handful that I thought could put me under the neon lights on the Sunset Strip. I recorded an EP with my old high school friends, and with my demo in hand I shopped around to get a record deal like a woman out of the seventeen-hundreds trying to barter silver for gold. Through my old boyfriend, Paul, I met Marshall Berle, comedian Milton Berle's nephew. With his long, thin face and oversized sunglasses, he became my manager and released my EP on his small independent label, Time Coast Records. Marshall was pretty well connected and before long we'd talked a few people into investing in my career. I re-recorded "Beverly Hills Brat" as my first single, and we shot a video between the palm trees and gated mansions, rolling down the wide streets in a Rolls Royce and me with wild hair. The record came out and was available for purchase in Tower Records, a store I consequently frequented daily as I stood in front of my EP, welling with pride and smiling happily and hopefully at every punk, hipster, and businessman that walked by.

I went on a small promotional tour and played a few intimate shows here and there, but my biggest splash was at Studio 54. It was 1983, when New York was bursting out of its glossy reputation and full of soul, grit, and artistic expression that manifested itself in sequins, bright colors, and twisted feral faces.

Years prior, my mom and stepdad had hosted a party at their house for Andy Warhol, where I asked him to sign the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* album cover that he'd designed, and he drew a vagina instead. Somehow, I managed to reconnect with him inside Studio 54's white paneled walls, and he eventually connected me with the club's



■ At my Studio 54 performance, October 4, 1983, with my former boyfriend, Paul Gomberg.

■ Flyer for my Studio 54 performance.

management. At midnight on October 4, 1983, with the city that never sleeps dancing outside, Studio 54 played the video to "Beverly Hills Brat" as I lip-synched on a high bridge that moved out over the twinkling crowd. I felt like I had made it, like I was stardust falling in everyone's eyes.

Unfortunately, my American rock career would only last a few months. My manager Marshall had taken the money we raised together, from *my* friends and contacts, and invested in Ratt, a heavy metal band with tattoos, long hair, and eyeliner. My high-flying stardust days were over.

I had put everything into those few songs, positive I'd succeed with Joe Smith's mantra in my head that if I tried hard enough, I could get there. It was the first time in my life that everything had fallen apart, like some half-baked pie that crumbled before you could get it on the plate. I was devastated and depressed, holed up in my dark room screaming at my mom and hating the world because I had no idea what to do next. Eventually, with my manager gone, my mother fed up, and my friends on their own professional paths, I picked up the phone and called my sister Judy who was studying abroad in London. Across a continent and an ocean, she hadn't had the chance to get sick of me yet.

"I need a change of scenery," I told her. "I'm going crazy stuck over here. Can I come visit?"

"I don't know," she replied, her voice far away. "I'm going on a school tour to Russia, Moscow and Leningrad. It's only three hundred dollars with all expenses paid."

It was the beginning of 1984 at that point. With Ronald Reagan in the White House, the State Department had started aggressively pushing for more educational and cultural exchanges as an almost subversive way to show Soviet citizens that Americans were freer, richer, and happier. Memories of my missed high school opportunity to go to the U.S.S.R. flooded back, mingling with the anxiety over my rockstar career that stung so strongly it was like a frying pan to the face.

"I want to go."

She checked if there was space, which there was. When I was confirmed on the trip, I had no idea what a pivotal moment in my life this would become – I was just so relieved to avoid another dull department store job for at least a few months. I picked up the phone again and called my best friend from high school to tell her that I was finally off to see the Soviet Union.

"Um *hello*, my sister married a Russian emigrant!" She reminded me. She gave me his name, Andrei Falalayev, whom I invited to lunch to talk about my trip.

"You have to meet my buddy," were the first words out of his mouth as he slid into a plastic red booth at the deli. "He's amazing. Are you going to Leningrad?"

"That's the plan," I said. "I'm not sure if we'll be able to leave the tour though."

"He's the most famous underground rockstar in Russia. Everyone loves him."

"I didn't know rock existed in Russia," I laughed, wondering what could compare to the American stars I'd heard. "How would I get a hold of him?"

As you would maybe expect of an underground, grit-and-grin type of guy, Andrei's buddy didn't have a phone, but his friend did. I took a name and number, saying I'd try to track him down.

"You've got to be careful, Joanna," Andrei said. "These guys aren't *supposed* to hang out with foreigners. It's considered illegal activity." He leaned forward across his plate of pancakes and the sticky table, as if sharing a secret. "But Boris Grebenshchikov doesn't care."

◆ Down the Rabbit Hole

We walked off the flight, through passport control, and into an arrival hall flanked by a line-up of grizzled, stone-faced guards with rifles. I had a flashback of walking into a diving competition, the chill of the large enclosed space and the feeling that everyone, their heads ducked down and their bodies flexing, is against you. Without even thinking, I began rolling my shoulders, my athletic ritual I thought I'd long forgotten. I had never enjoyed those competitions, and I didn't enjoy it now.

The guards took our bags under the floor-to-ceiling fluorescent lights and left to go through everything, pawing clothes aside until all that was left were the suitcases' bones. Judy and I stood there, side by side, shifting from one foot to the other as time became yet another foreign concept. I hated the thorny feeling of being powerless, much like I imagine it feels to visit a place like North Korea today.

After they handed us back our bags, we boarded the bus and drove to the Cosmos Hotel, which was still about twenty minutes from the center of Moscow. It was a gloomy, deserted, and desolate place, stuck on an ugly street corner. I asked a woman for directions to the elevator to get to my room, and she just stared at me like she was watching paint dry and peel away from a wall. Tapping into my survival mode, I found the elevator myself.

When I unpacked, I realized just how much my suitcases had been absolutely raided. The airport luggage handlers had taken my hairdryer, tampons, toothpaste, lipstick, and everything else that they couldn't easily get. Oddly enough, they didn't touch my album

■ Touring Moscow, April 1984.

cover or press photos I'd brought to show Boris how a real rockstar plays the game. In hindsight I should have taken it as a sign that the Moscow airport customs agents preferred my tampons over my album!

The tour group reconvened downstairs, where they drilled into our heads that we had to stick with the tour at all times. If we didn't, our little denim butts could be kicked out on the next overnight flight. I could tell the rules were very, very important to our Communist ringmasters, a hard pill to swallow for someone who had been driving since fourteen and sneaking out of high school weekly.

We spent three days in Moscow, which might as well have been three days on a different planet, surrounded by Moscow's bold communist-era murals and statues that glorified hard work and community. They were captivating and colorful like some sickening delusional drug. There were no advertisements, no billboards, no big street signs, just generic words in Russian on the buildings that said things like "*apteka*" (pharmacy) or "*bulochnaya*" (bakery) in block letters. The people wore blues and grays like bruises on their bodies, few smiled, and no one waved back at me. Everyone seemed unhappy to be there, waiting in the long public lines for their medicine and bread. The whole city felt cold, unwelcoming, and rigid.

Soon, though, I began to notice an artistic side to Moscow too, the sparkling eyes of an otherwise scowling and disinterested city. We saw historical landmarks, museums, buildings, and city parks, many of which were designed before the Communist revolution and still retained that flirty nostalgia of a previous time. The onion domes of St. Basil's

Cathedral were psychedelic in a stormy sea of dormant colors. Little by little, I could sense that somewhere deep down, the underbelly of the Soviet Union was warm and vibrant, hidden under all the metal armor. The country had obviously conditioned itself throughout the Communist era to accept a characterless chill, but there was still a rich culture underneath the unnerving facade. I found myself wishing the Russian people could celebrate their colorful side, wishing that someone could crack a smile or spill a laugh. It made me angry to see how people bought into this official Communist Moscow mentality. I remember thinking then that my father was basically right, that the Soviet Union was an awful place overrun by gargoyles and that I'd never want to visit again.

On the fourth day, we went on to Leningrad. Right away, it was obvious that the city had an energy and excitement that was much easier to find than Moscow. There was more color, soft yellows and pale blues and deep greens reflecting off the silvery canal waters and brightening the more Baroque and neoclassical architecture and onion-domed churches. My discontent was suddenly replaced by wonder, the dark blanket of the city more enchanting than sinister, like something out of a Siberian fairy tale.

As soon as we checked into the hotel, I told my sister that I was going to try to find this rocker guy Boris. I was sick of the official tour, locked into a glacial itinerary of statues and parks. This new city felt inspiring, and looking for Boris sounded like a challenge to spice things up. If they caught me away from the tour, would I really get sent home? I felt pretty confident I'd be fine, a born-and-bred American, with exceptionalism running through my veins.

I learned very quickly that nothing is easy in the Soviet Union. My sister Judy and I walked up to the old Russian *babushka* stationed on our floor, a government minder and local viceroy in charge of everything that went on in her domain, including full jurisdiction over whether or not two wide-eyed American girls could place a phone call or not.

"Hi, I'm Joanna." I gave her a huge bubbly smile. She didn't budge.

Hmm. "I. Would. Like. To. Make. A. Phone. Call." I said more seriously, trying to annunciate every word.

She watched me as I got out the piece of paper with the number.

"Please. Call. This. Number. Thanks." I placed it in front of her and waited for what seemed like hours, chewing the inside of my lip.

Finally, she grunted, which I counted as success. Boris didn't have a phone, but his cello player, Seva Gakkel did. After a few rings, a woman answered with a simple hello: "*Dobre dan*."

"Hi, I'm Joanna from California! Is Seva there?"

Click.

I looked back at Miss Congeniality, shrugged my shoulders, and slid the phone number back across the desk to her. Heaving a sigh, she dialed again.

"Hello?" It was a male voice this time, and in English.

"Hi!" I practically shouted, rushing to catch him before I heard the ugly click of the line. "My name is Joanna, and I'm from America, and my friend Andrei told me to call you to get in touch with his friend Boris. I'm a musician too!"

"Ah yes, where are you staying?" He asked. He was not a native speaker but spoke fluently and quickly with a soft Russian accent that made every word he said seem considered and significant. I tried to pronounce the name of the hotel, the Moskva.

"Come to the big metro station around the corner by your hotel at five p.m.," he said, and hung up. That was that. We had our invitation.

My sister and I looked at each other. Judy didn't wait for me to say anything before asking, "Wait, we're going to leave the tour?"

"Why not?"

"We can't, we'll get in so much trouble," she said, proving that the tour operators' message had been well received by at least some of us.

"I don't know what to tell you," I said. "I really want to go. We've just got to bite the bullet."

"There are real bullets here, Joanna…"

I cut her off. "We'll just say we're not feeling well and that we have to stay in and go to bed early tonight."

Little did anyone suspect that after the group had gone out, Judy and I were sneaking downstairs and out the back door of the brutish building, leaving our beds made and empty. Without knowing a word of Russian, we found our way to the metro station. I had no idea what to do next, waiting as hundreds of people pushed past us on their way home at rush hour. They were a sea of dark, brooding ships dragging along the concrete. We stood as still as possible next to the main exit, my hands in my pockets, wrapped around my passport and wallet. For the first time since I'd gotten there, I felt the tingling sensation in my body that reminded me I was a real human and capable of anything.

"Did he say what he looked like?" Judy asked me.

"He hung up before I could ask."

"Well it's a good thing you stand out." She glanced at my bleach blonde bangs and shaved sides. I looked like I fronted a punk band with some obscure name and angsty setlist.

And then, there he was. I knew it was Boris immediately. At first glance he was

practically indistinguishable from every other Russian, buried in a typical winter fur hat and long tweed coat. But we locked eyes, and I just *knew* in that moment that a very special person, a magical person, was entering my life. I didn't know how or why, but I could just feel that I would never be the same ever again.

"Hello, nice to meet you," Seva said from behind Boris. I looked at him long enough to notice his long face and thoughtful blue eyes. But once my eyes met Boris' again, they never left. It was like looking into the sun long enough that you always see it directly in front of you.

Seva and Boris grabbed Judy and me by our arms and kept moving.

"We're going to my place," said Seva as he pulled me along through the crowd. His long legs took one stride for every two I took. "We can talk there. We aren't supposed to meet with foreigners. You never know who's an informant."

I glanced at him in disbelief. Did he really think anyone would assume I was a threat with my dangling budget earrings and mismatched layers?

He lowered his voice. "I'm serious." He pulled Judy and me aside into a covered doorway. Boris leaned casually against it, nodding along as Seva instructed us, "Don't speak English in public, and never tell anyone you're an American." He pulled at his short beard with his thumb and pointer finger. "Come on, we have to get out of the street."

We started walking briskly again. "You're here on a tour, yes?" he asked. Judy nodded.

"If anyone ever catches you out in public alone, tell them you were separated from your tour, yes? Best to avoid trouble."

It was hard at that first meeting to understand the gravity of what he was saying. In that moment I was blinded and enamored; there was something about the way Boris walked and the soft hidden smile always resting on his face that made me feel powerful and passionate in Lenin's City, that turned the grey clouds to silver.

Seva's apartment was in the center of Leningrad in a Stalinist neoclassical building that was slumped and dull. The main entrance and stairs were all plain grey concrete, everything leaning slightly to one side as if the building itself were exhausted. Seva's apartment felt lived in, full of antique trinkets on the walls that reminded me of my grandparents' house. An acoustic guitar hung on the wall. Just inside the main door sat a bench filled with a bunch of *tapki*, or slippers. No one ever walked around their apartment in shoes. As I looked through the bench to find a suitable pair, I noticed that much like the building, most of the *tapki* looked old, worn, and lived in.

The kitchen door swung open and a woman rushed past us to leave.

"Who was that?" I asked Seva.

"My mom."

"Can I meet her?" Without even realizing it, meeting Seva and Boris had started me on a quest to get under the impassive exterior of the Soviets.

"Not now. Maybe next time."

Judy and I settled around a small, fabric-covered table with Boris while Seva brought out pickles, cookies, and cups of umber tea. The ceilings stretched up three meters above him while he moved around the space backlit by the tall windows. There were two main rooms that I could see, a large gathering room with a smaller lumpy bed and a proper bedroom, with a small bathroom and an even smaller kitchen shoved at odd angles into the apartment. I felt warm and happy; the whole thing was somehow festive with the heavy clouds and cold air pressing up against the windows. Russian hospitality was something that would always feel as welcoming and wholehearted as it did on that first visit, every single time. The contrast between Russians in public and in private could not have been more striking, like jumping between an ice bath and a hot tub.

The bedroom was covered in Seva's posters, several of which were of The Beatles and John Lennon, as well as several deep and faded religious icons hung over the white walls or a faded tapestry. They were surrounded by necklaces and other beaded wall decorations, like something out of a sepia '70s photograph. There's a great photo of Seva in his bed beneath the potpourri of pictures, draped in a patterned blanket with a bandanna wrapped around his forehead.

Seva himself looked like a cross between George Harrison and Jesus Christ, complete with long shadowy hair and a dark mustache and beard. He had a low-key vibe and a casual cadence to his posture. His words were direct in a way that made me feel I had his full attention and consideration, the same with the small smile that reached his eyes. Sitting across from him and Boris that first time, I saw the two could really not be more different. Unlike Seva's subtle seriousness, Boris had an unguarded, spontaneous attitude. He was gorgeous in a way that made me stop and stare, reminding me perpetually of David Bowie with his flowing blonde hair that framed his angular chin and bright blue eyes. He had an exceptional spirit that overwhelmed his chiseled physical stature and made him appear ten feet tall even just lounging next to me.

To my surprise, Boris' English was as good as Seva's. As we talked, Boris pulled out a piece of white paper and an old plastic film can. He poured grass from the can on the paper, licked it, rolled it, lit it, and smoked. I thought he was smoking a joint, but when I asked, he said it was called a papirosi cigarette. The smoke was sweet and transparent, and it framed his face in this angelic way that made him seem even more supernatural.

■ Me, Boris Grebenshchikov, and Seva Gakkel at Seva's apartment, Leningrad, April 1984.

"How in the world is your English so good?" Judy asked.

"We had four of the best teachers in the world: Elvis, Dylan, Lennon, and McCartney," said Boris, trying to curtail his witty smile. He went on, "When you listen to their records every day, you start to wonder what they're saying. Then you get a bilingual dictionary and just start looking up words. It's not that hard really."

"How do you get their records?" Judy asked.

"First we listened on short wave radio from London. But the black market has almost everything," said Seva.

"We don't just listen," Boris said. "We sing the songs too. Anyone who plays music will probably speak at least basic English. After I found The Beatles, I started reading American poets like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg."

I widened my eyes and nodded like I was also a big fan, but in reality, I had only the faintest idea of the sultry spirited figures who wore those names. All I remembered from university was the semester at sea I'd taken across the world, dipping my toes into the Mediterranean but never into *On the Road* or *Dharma Bums*. These guys knew more about my culture than I did.

"Every once in a while," Boris continued, "someone gets their hands on an American movie, and we all gather around to watch it."

"But tell us about your music, Joanna," said Seva. "We'd love to hear it."

I played "Beverly Hills Brat" and "Boys They're My Toys" on my Walkman. Boris listened on the headphones, leaning back on the worn sofa with one leg tossed carelessly

across his other and his eyes closed.

"This is really good," he said. "But what is a brat?"

I explained that they were the rich kids with whom I'd grown up, the posers and the players with their shiny cars and upturned noses.

"Ha! We don't have that problem here," Seva said. He took the plastic headphones. "I agree, I like it."

"Do you have any of your music?" I asked, happy with the feedback and wanting to offer some of my own.

"Yes, but only on cassette, not on a record like yours," Boris said. "We don't have access to a studio. We need someone who works at a real studio to borrow a tape machine for the weekend. If someone gets hold of a tape recorder for a couple of days, everyone shows up to record. The tapes are copied and distributed all throughout the country. Sometimes we even make artistic covers, just like in America."

"Why can't you record in a real studio?" I asked.

"We're not an 'official' band," Seva said.

"Some groups have signed government contracts. They can play in public and get paid," Boris said. "They have access to studios and high-quality instruments, and they can release music on Melodiya, the only record label in Russia."

"Why don't you do that?" I asked.

Boris paused and leaned forward, like he was simultaneously teaching a lesson to a child and sharing a secret with me, as if he'd known me our whole lives. "Because 'official' bands have to turn over their lyrics first to the government. They're censored. That makes them dull. But everyone has to have a government job here, so for some, being in an 'official' band is a job like any other. I used to be a night watchman. It was great – if I worked twenty-four hours straight, I could take the next five days off. It gives me time to play. Now I am a music tutor, and I work when I want. I might play my own music illegally underground, but I'm more free this way. It's really not so bad." With everything he said, there was always that slight smile tugging at his lips or some deeply contained laughter lighting up his eyes, like he was slightly amused by everything and never took the world too seriously.

I put on my headphones as Boris slid the cassette into my Walkman and pressed play. From the first chord that filled my head, the music was haunting and spiritual, and when Boris sang his voice was piercingly distraught and absolutely consuming. The music was driving and frenetic, a wolf howling or a waterfall blasting over boulders and down an eighty-foot drop, and even though I didn't understand a word I felt enlightened and magnified. It felt deep, grand, and intense, conveying simultaneous alternate realities of

despair and hope, sadness and joy, darkness and ecstasy. It was pure. It was Boris.

I blushed and sank back in my chair, hit by a hard combination of embarrassment and panic as a warm and almost nauseous feeling came over me. Here I was, thinking I was some big-shot American rocker from Studio 54 over whom all these repressed Russian musicians would drool, but I could not have been more wrong. In that moment, I realized that I was not an artist, but instead just some silly kid with sugary dreams, writing dumb songs about my high school classmates. Boris had more talent in one song than I could ever hope to have in my entire body. It was like a strike of lightning illuminating the world of music for me, and I finally understood the power, resonance, and backbone of what an incredible song should be.

As we began to wrap up, Boris leaned into me and said, "I'm going to play at an underground concert tomorrow night if you can sneak out again. I'd love to have you there. It is not our rock band, but a crazy experimental evening led by Sergey Kuryokhin, or 'Capitán' as he's better known." He pronounced it Cap-ee-TAN, that glimmer still in his eyes.

"It will be incredibly unpredictable," Seva said excitedly.

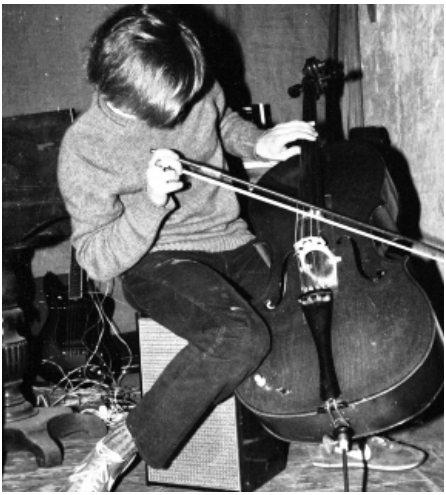
◆

Of course, I wanted to go. I felt that nothing would be meaningful until I could hear more of this music and see more of these guys who seemed to experience life on a deeper, esoteric level. The next day, Judy and I again told our tour guide that I wasn't feeling well and Judy would have to stay and take care of me. We snuck out around eight in the evening and met one of Boris and Seva's friends around the corner from the hotel with the sun still bright above us. She nodded at me, which I took as a signal to follow her. We were as discreet as possible, never speaking a word of English and doing our best to look as cold and indifferent as we could. I caught Judy's eye out of the corner of my eyes, and we shared a quick-lived smile.

The friend led us to what looked like an abandoned old house, cracked and sighing with a slanted roof and covered windows. We entered into a room where the exposed rusted pipes looked ready to burst in the white brick and the windows were covered with oversized black fabric. If this building had been anywhere back in Los Angeles, there would have been a giant "condemned" sign on the front door.

The room's key attribute was its large size. The hosts had set up about forty mismatched wooden chairs that were all filled. Boris wrapped his strong hand around the neck of a cello and attempted to play it, awkwardly holding the bow like a fork. A few other musicians hit drumsticks and dug their heels into the ground to keep time with him. One guy played

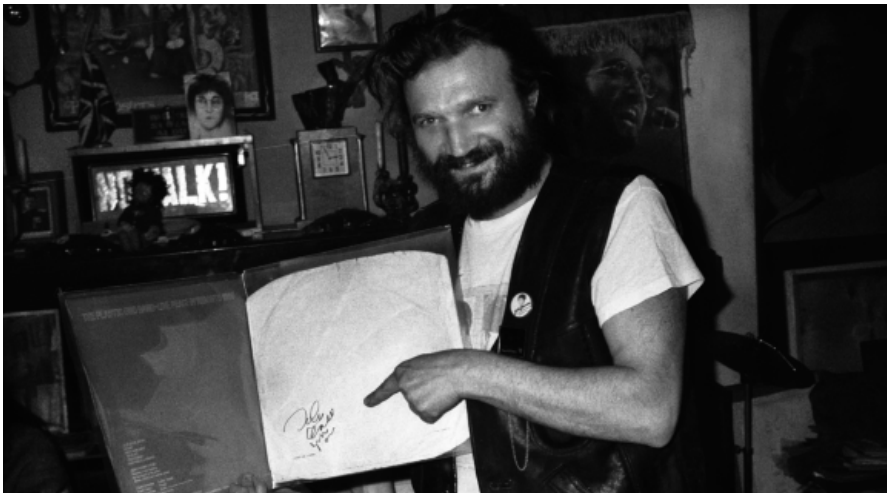
■ Sergey Kuryokhin, "The Capitán," put together and conducted underground concerts.



■ Boris playing cello at the first underground concert I went to in Leningrad, April 1984.

the electric bass guitar without electricity while Sergey conducted with a saxophone in his mouth, all behind a contraption of hanging weights and irons that sounded like a synthesizer. Unlike Seva and Boris' quieter demeanor, Sergey Kuryokhin was a rambunctious, childlike, and mischievous streak of movement and light. He had a young angular face but was already a master at his craft and in complete control of utter madness. It was such an eclectic sound that I wondered for a moment if it could be called music, but somehow all this jumbled chaos transformed into something palpable and vibrant that filled up my entire being. This art, this transformational experimentalism, was the purest form of creation and existence I had ever felt in my life.

The 1980s in Leningrad was similar to what I heard about the hippy '60s in America, a time all would come to reminisce about decades later with a sparkle in their eyes and the taste of euphoria still on their tongues. It was one of the best nights of my life, and looking back, it was the moment I realized I was witnessing something extremely special and surreal. My new friends were incredible musicians, but they were artists as well and capable of forging these intense and intimate experiences through paintings, dancing, poetry, and so on. They found ways to fill the long empty days of communistic enterprises by this type of indirect protest, producing imagery, lyrics, and movements that bonded participants and shaped solidarity. My sister Judy and I looked at each other and knew we had to capture this momentum and perception of the world, subsequently taking film, pictures, and interviews of our new friends as much as possible in the time that followed. This damp underground



■ Kolya Vasin told us that he sent a telex every year for John Lennon's birthday and one year Yoko and John sent him back a signed album. It was one of his prized possessions.

scene off a side street in Leningrad was the eye of a storm, surrounding us with an electric and overpowering energy that was inescapable.

After the show, Boris and Sergey took me to meet their friend Kolya Vasin, better known as "The Beatles Guy." His room in a communal flat was filled with what had to be over a thousand Beatles items: oversized posters, colorful records that were still only available from the Russian black market over twenty years after release in the West, portraits and buttons and magnets with those four iconic faces bright and open and ready to start singing in the very language Judy and I were generally forbidden to speak. I'd never seen anything like it, nor met anyone as dedicated and devoted as Kolya. With flushed cheeks he told us that he had been sending a telex to John Lennon every year for his birthday and one year he received a signed album back from John and Yoko.

Kolya was nothing like I expected when I had been told about "The Beatles Guy." He was big and burly with a dark tousled beard and mustache that concealed a large reoccurring grin. He couldn't have been more jovial. He didn't know English except for what he learned from Beatles song lyrics, so that's what guided our conversations as he served us warm food and drinks that spilled over the rims of the glasses.

"Thank you so much for dinner, Kolya," I said.

"Johnny!" he responded, pronouncing my name as so many Russians perceived it. "All you need is love!"

"True, all you need is love, Kolya." I responded. "I loved the dinner."

"Johnny! I am the walrus!" was his reply.

He pointed towards an overstuffed harlequin scrapbook he'd made of John Lennon's life and gestured like he was writing a signature in midair. As I looked through it, I realized that he'd had all his guests sign the name "John Lennon" across the wide white pages. He smiled at me as I signed my own version.

Sergey Kuryokhin was there too. In these early days, Sergey would end up hanging around with Boris and me most nights I was in Leningrad. It didn't hurt that, like me, he didn't smoke or do drugs, a rarity among the Russians. He drank – he wouldn't be Russian if he didn't – but that was the extent of his vices. I was first drawn to him because of his endless energy and expressive enthusiasm.

"Jo," he'd say, working against the language barrier, then he'd make a funny face, yelp, or grunt to convey his thoughts. He was just about the most evocative person I'd ever met.

Sergey was a genius, and he knew it. Everyone did. He constantly had musical ideas floating through his head like shiny jellyfish on an open endless ocean. His foot was always tapping or his fingers moving and jumping as if they were playing some imaginary piano. I don't know when he slept. He was transcendent – whether it was official rock artists, underground bands, classical musicians, jazz performers, the intelligentsia, or music critics, everyone respected and loved Sergey Kuryokhin.

That first night I met him is still one of my favorite experiences, full of dazzling strangers and indelible memories. As Judy and I were wrapping up to sneak back to the hotel, The Beatles Guy looked at me beaming and shouted, "Strawberry fields forever, Johnny!"

We were scheduled to leave the next day, but I couldn't get on the plane without saying one more goodbye to Boris. We arranged to meet again in the street, camouflaged between the grim barreling bodies of the working world, and he led me to his place. He lived on the top floor of an old smirking building that had flights and flights of stairs. He floated up like the angel he was as I desperately tried to keep up, huffing and puffing my platinum hair out of my face. There were hundreds of drawings and writings on the stair walls, yellow and red and black portraits and poetry offered to the guru of rock 'n roll where fans would sometimes even stand and serenade. As the apartment door swung open, a bunch of people scattered out of the kitchen to their bedrooms. The only one left was the one face I knew: Seva.

"It's a communal flat," Boris said. "It's difficult to get an apartment, especially in the city center, so most people live bunched together like this."

"Why are they running away?"

"You can get in trouble for talking to foreigners, but if people go into the bedrooms, they technically didn't see you. It's an alibi. I can almost guarantee that the KGB will stop

■ Me and Boris, sitting on the rooftop of his apartment building, Leningrad, 1984.

by after you leave."

I tried to ignore that thought as we sat down to the sweet cookies and bitter tea Boris put out. Boris again rolled a papirosi. I normally hated cigarette smoke, but Boris' didn't bother me. I found myself inhaling deeply, trying to imprint the savory scent in my brain as I listened to Boris' voice.

"There was a banker guy here a few months ago who said he worked with David Bowie. He took some of my recordings and supposedly Bowie heard them and liked them. He asked if Bowie could buy me something I needed. Could you find him again? He could help me."

"I'll try. Do you have his number?" Boris gave it to me.

"I want to come back." I said. "I think you have an incredible gift. People in America should hear your music, and I want to help you. If I can come back, what could I bring?"

"Many have said they'll come back," Seva said. "They never do." He gave a small shrug and held up his hands.

"I'm coming back." I could think of nothing else. I hadn't even left, and already I was planning when, not if, I'd return. The brief encounters I had with these musicians, the unpolished silver heart of the city, had already clued me in to what I never knew I was missing back home. Up until that point I'd been content to float through life without ever really grounding myself. These guys, Herculean in spirit and mind, were my saving grace. For the first time, I felt the novelty of purpose: both the inspirational purpose these men had for their music, and the motivational purpose for me to get back to this place, where I was learning what it was to be human and consequently what it was to be myself.

That morning before leaving the hotel to find Boris, I thought of giving him a present from America as a way for him to remember me while I was gone. I thought of the Western alcohol bottles he collected along his bedroom shelf, drained and shiny, or the Bob Dylan poster on the wall. What could I give him that he hadn't already started collecting? I remembered him mentioning that he had never seen red sneakers like my red Converse All Stars and my big, baggy jeans with enough pockets to store an entire orchestra. I knew the shoes would be too small, but I brought them with me and gave them to him. I watched him squeeze and twist and turn his feet until he forced them in and tied up the tight white laces, then doing the same dance with my jeans.

"It's perfect," he said. He didn't know that years later I would be taking fashion queues from him, loading cool silver rings with big colored stones onto my fingers and falling in love with the striped t-shirts he used to wear. His style was so Bohemian, reminding me of the freedom of the open seas which I would cross to come back to Russia and Boris again.

"You still didn't answer me," I said, returning to the moment. "If I can come back, what else do you want? And what do you want me to tell Bowie you need?"

"A Fender Stratocaster guitar." He said it as if he had known his whole life that's what he wanted, and when I promised I'd ask, his cheeks pushed into his eyes as he smiled.

I asked Boris then if I could interview him on my Walkman. It would be the first of many interviews over the years, an excerpt of which is printed here.

Before we said the final goodbye on that first trip, Boris said he wanted to take me to church. It was Orthodox Easter, and Boris was on paper a Christian and in spirit, a sage of acceptance, tolerance, and knowledge. I'd grown up in a household with a mother who had been raised Catholic and a father who had been raised Jewish, resulting in a religious impasse that had left me suspicious of and unresponsive to its ability to heal or incentivize. I agreed to go with Boris anyway. Religion was technically illegal in Russia, but like many things in Russia it had become unofficially tolerated. Standing outside the soft orange building I could tell his eyes, like Seva's, doubted me as we hugged goodbye. He had no way of understanding that as I walked away, watching him in my jeans, red shoes, and bandanna tied casually over his golden hair, I finally felt like I had faith in something. He was the light, and like any sane, instinctual creature, I wanted to follow the light.

That's how it started. For the next twelve years, Russia became my life as I made good on my promise and returned again and again. It was the first time I think an American had proved Boris and Seva wrong.

◆ Interview with Boris Grebenshchikov

Joanna – How did the band get started?

Boris – The band started around 1972 with one of my childhood friends. We had no amplification and didn't care about it. We just began to write our own songs, and we got an idea of forming a band. The people just began to drift around us, and some good musicians began to appear – so it happened. Nobody ever tried to do something to request somebody – just friends and friends of friends happened to be good musicians, and right now we have very good players.

Who writes the songs?

I write 99% of them, but we arrange the music together. I just put out an idea – play something. I think I'll go that way and that way, and then we begin to rehearse when we rehearse. We don't usually rehearse.

Would you leave the country now if you could?

I think what I'm doing here is very needed. The people need what we are doing, and if we won't do it, nobody will do it. We are just beginning, right now, to create a place for ourselves in this social structure. It is a shame that previously there was no place for people like us. Before it was – you either just conform to what everybody's doing and to the way of doing things or you just stay in your ethical place, do what you want but nobody hears about it. Right now, with what we are doing we are getting bigger and

bigger and instead of stopping us – um, well – they can stop us at any given time…

How?

They could put us in jail or something, but we are talking about right now and to do this kind of thing would be out of hand. They would like to have some reason to do this, but they have no reason. Still, we are trying not what everybody in official arts is doing but quite opposite things. Maybe fifteen years ago it was impossible.

Why is it possible now?

Because nobody quite understands what is going on. Nobody knows for sure what will be the next official line in art, so just to be on the safe side they have a little bit of everything, and we are trying not to be a little bit but a really bigger and bigger bit.

How do you get your music heard?

We are one of the first bands in Russia who began to do our own music and put it out on tape. Everybody in this country has a ¼-inch tape player. When we started it in 1980, we made our own covers, and every tape which I give to somebody or sell, or something gets copied and the copies begin to circulate wider and wider all around the country. Right now, I get letters from all over Russia, even from the most eastern cities like Vladivostok and Khabarovsk in Siberia near Japan and the people - they are listening to what we are doing, especially lots of young people. We are getting bigger and bigger, and I'm interested to see where this gamble will lead us because really it is a gamble. We do our own thing, and the government tries from one side to hush us and from to the other to cooperate. The government is not centralized enough to have one opinion on anything. Some people are for us and others are against us. At this point we've managed to survive somehow, and it's a very funny thing – now when we're beginning to be real rockstars, in terms of popularity and autographs and all this stuff, we are not getting any money.

Is this a problem?

No, not really because when you worry about money you do nothing, and we've carved a place for ourselves in this wall – this stone wall where we manage to live.

What about concerts – where do you play and how is it all arranged?

You see we have a very funny kind of organization right here for the last two years. It's called the Rock Club, and the members are just all the amateur (underground) bands. It is sponsored by the KGB.

~~SECRET~~

(S) LA [redacted] b1 b3

The issue of Blackmail in regards to forced cooperation with the Soviets was addressed and the issue of possession of narcotics in the Soviet Union.

Fields appeared curious and willing to be interviewed but not in the presence of her mother.

It is theoretically possible that Fields is currently already cooperating with Soviet officials. She refused in the initial interview to identify her affiliate in New York with Soviet Union associations and was very curious about Soviet intelligence officers who she thought the FBI might have been surveilling or analyzing in the past.

In order to establish dates of travel, identifying data, and pertinent intelligence the following leads are being set forth. Subject is described as follows for this purpose.

Name:	Joanne Lee Fields
Alias Name:	Joanna Stingray Fields
Date of Birth:	July 3, 1960
Current Address:	880 Loma Vista Drive Beverly Hills, California
Former Addresses:	308 South Wetherly Drive, Beverly Hills, California 1022 North Beverly Glen City Los Angeles, California 330 South Spaulding Drive Beverly Hills, California 9483 Date Street Spring Valley, California 92077
Mother:	[redacted] b6 b7C
Father:	
Sex:	Female
Hair:	Blonde full-strip center, dark brown sides, Medium length
Eyes:	Green
Height:	5'8"
Weight:	135 lbs.
Vehicle:	1982 Mazda license BFIESTY now changed to: license CBRATGO (personalized)
Convictions:	None Criminal One vehicle code violation on file
Memberships:	Musicians Credit Union, Local 47 817 Vine Street Hollywood, California

~~SECRET~~

- 5 -

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation

BETSY KOPP CORDOVA
Special Agent

11000 Wilshire Blvd.
West Los Angeles, CA 90024

(213) 477-6565
(213) 272-6161

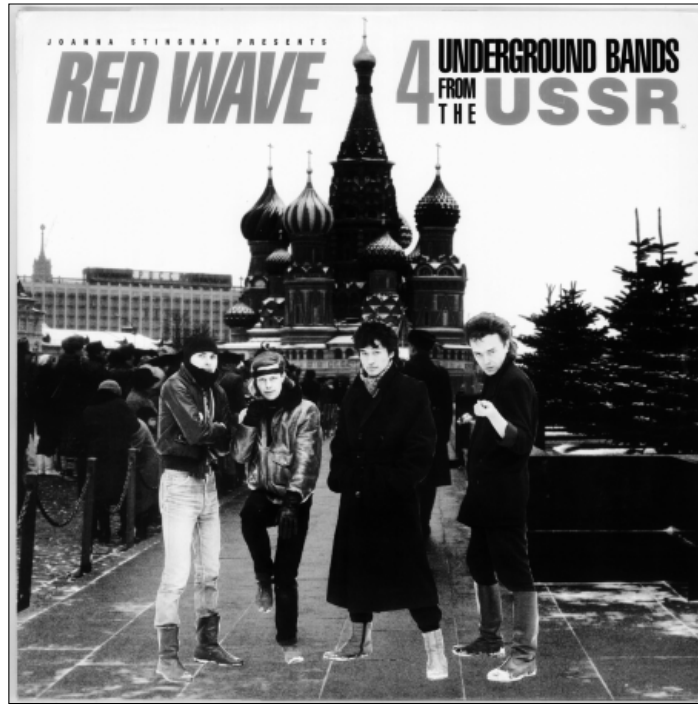
■ The FBI investigator assigned to my case was Betsy Cordova.

■ I brought Andy Warhol some examples of Russian art, including this collage by Oleg Kotelnikov, 1985.

were, and as he ravenously dug through my images, he told me he couldn't believe that halfway around the world people were creating graffiti styles parallel to Keith Haring and Basquiat. I gave him two pieces of actual art, one collage from Timur Novikov and one from Oleg Kotelnikov. Warhol, who had greeted me with a limp handshake, now grasped the works strongly in his hands as he tried to cling to his own piece of Wonderland.

I told him how all the Russians knew and idolized him and asked him if he would sign some Campbell soup cans to my friends if I ran out to buy some. Fifteen minutes later I was sitting with my legs crossed beside Warhol under the industrial lights while I spelled out name after name for him to write on the cans. He was such a trooper, laughing at himself as he tried to get the foreign names right. Before I left, he told me to keep in touch and let him know what was happening with "the guys." That day, Warhol put the "ordinary" in "extraordinary," a humble, gracious man with a nose for brilliance and a new vision of the Soviet Union under his white wig.

Flash forward to the customs at the Russian airport where I had to explain to the grizzly guards how I had terrible food allergies and had to travel with the only food I could eat: Campbell's soup. I had lugged them across two continents and an ocean in my backpack, refusing to let them out of my sight. I wasn't going to shoulder all that just so those pejorative authorities could eat it all up.


JOANNA STINGRAY PRESENTS
RED WAVE
4 UNDERGROUND BANDS FROM THE USSR


AQUARIUM
ASHES
TONIGHT
DANCE ON THE EDGE OF THE SPRING
THE THIRST
DREAMS OF SOMETHING BIGGER
ROCK N' ROLL'S DEAD
KINO
SAW A NIGHT
FILMS
NIGHT
CITY
WAKE UP (IT'S LOVE)
STREETCAR HEADED EAST
ALISA
EXPERIMENTOR
WE'RE TOGETHER
DR. BOOGIE
BAD BOY
JUICE SQUEEZER
COME TO ME
STRANGE GAMES
METAMORPHOSES
CHOROVOD SONG
NO TELEPHONE
EGOCENTRISM 2
IF YOU THINK
PAPER FLOWERS
PEACE TO THE WORLD
МИРУ МИР

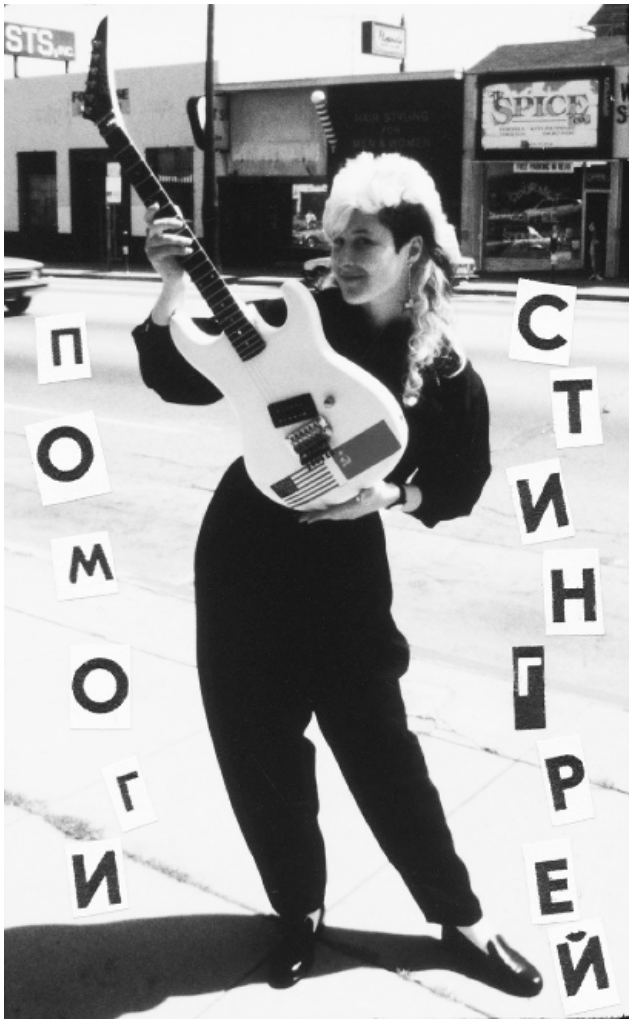
■ *Red Wave* interior covers.

I showed up at Hotel Evropeiskaya off Nevsky Prospekt five minutes early, my hands and feet freezing as I walked into the wooden and marble foyer. I could remember when Boris was grabbed in that same airy foyer as if it were yesterday, and for a moment I felt that same sense of hopelessness I'd had when I'd seen his golden halo of hair disappearing between two dark government figures. I shook my head to clear it, squaring my shoulders. This would be different. This time, the KGB wasn't coming for me. I was, in a sense, coming for them.

Just days before my flight back home, Boris had told me that two sociology professors

from the university asked if they could ask me some questions about America and American life. His tone, the even slower drawl and enunciated words, clued me in to the fact that this was not just a straightforward academic discussion. Apparently, after refusing my request to speak on the last trip, the KGB had had second thoughts. I'd said yes without even thinking about it, determined to try and win them over.

Now here I was, in my oversized vest and tight black pants, watching as two out-of-shape men in worn suits walked towards me through the gilded lobby. For a second, I considered that maybe these really were two professors genuinely interested in the day



■ *Help Stingray* cassette cover, 1987.

■ At the Neva River with the wedding party after the ceremony, November 2, 1987.

seat. We sped around all the historic sites throughout the city, our guests following in a bus as we stopped at the Neva River to take pictures. Yuri hopped out of the car and knelt on one knee to help me out.

"We're not alone," Marc said, filming as another couple came to wash their hands in the Neva River as well.

"I've got all I need right here," I told him, clinging to Yuri's warm body as the icy water froze my fingers. With a smile he grabbed another champagne bottle and held it to my mouth. He and Viktor played around along the bank, grabbing me and backing up as if they were going to drag us all into the indigo waters. We took pictures as Viktor acted out kung fu and I teased my dress higher to show off my garter, with Yuri pretending to unzip his pants to pee on the wall.

"*Krysha payekhala*!" We called out to the guests that were arriving and climbing out of the bus. "Our roofs are moving!"

There's such an iconic shot of me, Gustav, Boris, Yuri, Tikhomirov, Titov, Krisanov, Afrika, and Viktor standing in front of the river. We all look so young, so convinced of our purpose and lost in the moment. Decades later, Russian media wrote that this "rock-wedding" was the most beautiful, pivotal wedding of the '80s, the day when the Cold War finally seemed to end.

■ Traveling around Leningrad in the Chaika with Viktor and Marianna and stopping at the Neva River. Photos at the river by Valentin Baranovsky.

Our next stop was Senatskaya Ploshchad, Senate Square, which had been erected in 1704 as one of the first squares in St. Petersburg and marked the spot of the Decembrist Revolt of 1825. It was getting so cold as the day wore on, and after a shot of vodka in the car we all raced out to take some photos in front of the bronze horseman statue of Peter the Great with the wistfully magnificent St. Isaac's Cathedral behind us.

"Welcome back, here we are, who knows where!" Marc shouted behind the camera, well enough past tipsy to be smiling despite the sinking cold. "Shot of vodka and Joanna is about to do the old roll. She had a little too much to drink. Let's see if we can get the lovely lady's face here up close and personal. Let's see, excuse me, excuse me!"

"No, no, that's not fair!" My eyes were so glassy and my words slurring together like ice into the ocean as I laughed. "You're hitting below the belt, below the belt, Marc. Stop!"

"Are you Joanna Stingray Kasparyan?" Marc sung out.

"Marc, Viktor wants to kiss you. Viktor, kiss him!"

Viktor leaned in and kissed the video camera lens. His warm breath fogged the screen. "Oh my god," Marc bellowed. "I've been wounded!"

There must have been some bottles on the bus too, because everyone seemed to be becoming immune to the cold. Boris emerged with his arms stretched out like a falcon ready to drop into a valley. We all placed white flowers at the bottom of the horseman, sharing bottles and lining up for a photo the photographers called "Red Wave 2!"

◆

■ Yuri and me in front of the statue of Peter the Great, Senate Square.

■ Afrika, Yuri, me, and Tikhomirov on stage at the First of May Palace of Culture the night before our wedding.

"Don't laugh! You're laughing, I can hear you!" Marc taunted Yuri and me as the car drove in circles to see how long we could continue to kiss.

"Fuck off," I mumbled through the kiss. I could hear Viktor and Marianna howling with laughter.

"Fuck off, Marc!" Yuri managed to get out.

Russian weddings notoriously go on for days. It looked like ours was going to be no exception. As we piled back into the limo yet again, I felt high on excitement and alcohol. The car turned down the wide street, and I leaned against Yuri.

"*Krysha payekhala*!" He said happily, raising his hand to the ceiling of the car as we sped towards a restaurant. "Our roof is moving!"

"Come on, my darling wife." Yuri smiled so wide it was contagious. "Let's go to our party."

Yuri and I, with more champagne in our hands, walked into the airy Austeria Restaurant in the Peter and Paul Fortress. The guests clapped and whistled, as someone made a loud toast and we all downed our entire slender glasses.

"*Gorko*! *Gorko*!" Everyone screamed. "*Bitter*!"

In order to make it sweeter, the couple is supposed to kiss for as long as possible while the guests count. I was more than happy to oblige. Little did I know, this would be a ritual repeated dozens and dozens of times throughout the intimate evening.

The room was warm and comfortable with its white walls and exposed wooden beams overhead. There were two very long tables down each side of the room, connected

◆ 1988–1996 ◆

■ "Glory, Rock 'n Roll, Peace" Stingray promotional postcard.

■ Stills from the music video for "War," 1990.

All I could do was stare at the huge, perky nipple he had clearly articulated in his art. In my head I could picture Viktor's reaction to it, his surprised eyes and then his deep laugh as he would crack up. I covered my mouth with my hand, trying not to offend the guy as I burst out laughing too.

Viktor was a hero, immortalized and empowered. When I climbed onstage or walked down the street, I always tried to channel his energy. There were very few other women in the Russian rock scene, and I wanted to make young girls feel capable and strong when they watched my videos and saw me on motorcycles, dancing, being silly, and taking charge. I strove to be like Viktor for my own demographic.

◆

Sasha Vasilyev started staying at my place some nights because he didn't have a place to live. He had a wry and witty sense of humor that lit up the sad mornings or dark evenings. During that hard time in my life all I really needed was a little laughter. For some reason, my connection to Yuri felt distant without Viktor there.

■ Outside the Melodiya record store before the release of my album *Walking Through Windows*.

her any question, and we will relay it to her."

"Will you really?" The woman looked directly into the camera. "Joanna, honey! What do you make of your Russian fans? I would want to ask about her plans for the future and ask her to make more concerts in Moscow. And not only in Moscow but throughout the U.S.S.R." She paused, struggling to find the next words she wanted to say in English. "Joanna, I love you very much!"

I was at my apartment getting ready for the signing. I had no idea such a big crowd had gathered, and in my mind, I was worrying that not enough people would show up. How embarrassing that would be! I finished getting dressed and sat on the corner of my bed, eyeing the clock as my nerves built.

The crowd was getting larger by the minute.

"Just send her a huge hello, we love her very much," another fan shouted to the camera.

"What do you love her for?" The journalist asked.

"She is a wonderful singer and a wonderful person!"

"How do you know what kind of person she is?"

"It's obvious!"

If only I could have heard what they were saying as I bounced my knees nervously in my apartment, chewing my nails and anticipating a quiet, sad event.

■ Monsters of Rock concert at Tushino Airfield, September 28, 1991. There was no official count, but according to the *New York Times*, Times Warner estimated possibly over half a million people were in attendance. Image unattributed.

jarring and almost scary way. But as the crowd jammed their fists in the air and jumped up and down with the heavy bass beat, I couldn't help but get caught up in their excitement. The next band was Black Crows, a unique kind of hippie version of the Rolling Stones with prolific lyrics that made my jaw brush the floor.

"I can't believe it," I whispered to myself as my eyes drifted from the grungy band to the innumerable people screaming, singing, and holding up their hands in rock signs.

Metallica absolutely blew the crowd to pieces. James Hetfield's flowing hair and iconic mustache vibrated with his high pitches and the long guitar solos. There were a few incidences with the police during their set, dealing with drunk and rowdy fans, but even the police seemed thrilled to be there in the thick of things. I kept thinking how disgusted the old KGB would think it all was – the long, dirty hair, the eyeliner, the screams and the gravel in their voices. Just a few years ago AC/DC and their music had been banned from the Soviet Union. It almost made me laugh to imagine the old guard's twitching, traumatized eyes and frowning muzzles if they were to witness this.

AC/DC climbed the stage to the sound of shrieks and catcalls. I couldn't take my eyes off the guitarist Angus Young in his black shorts and tie. He was hysterical and hypnotic, performing against the lead singer in his black newsboy cap. Their first song, "Back in

■ Some of the strongest performers I saw in concert in the Soviet Union channeled that unmistakable masculine rock energy of their Western male peers. Left to right: Misha Barzukin of Televisor, Yuri Shevchuk of DDT, Andrei Panov ("Pig") of Automatic Satisfiers. Photos from various concerts in 1988.

Black," was one I realized I knew! Sasha loved that song, but I'd never known who the artists were. The singer, Brian Johnson had a voice like a bird plummeting from the sky, moving around the stage with an animated face. The whole crowd sang "Highway to Hell" in unison, and unlike the staccato songs of the previous bands, I could get swept up in a melody and a story. Out of the corner of my eyes, I could see even the police and guards had their hands up in reverence. Somewhere in the set, Angus Young lost his shirt, tie, and jacket, writhing on the ground with his fingers crawling around his guitar and sweat pooling around his body. As I watched a naked blow up doll with huge boobs float over the stage, I couldn't believe I was in the Soviet Union. I kept shaking my head, expecting it to all vanish and then settle like dust.

At the end of the last song, a stunning show of pyrotechnics and fireworks exploded around the stage. As the crowd began to pour out from the airfield, the military men formed two straight lines to make a path for the people. I watched bright and fiery eyes disappear calmly into the night. It was iconic. I stood there knowing the Soviet Union had reached a point from which there was no going back.

◆ A New World

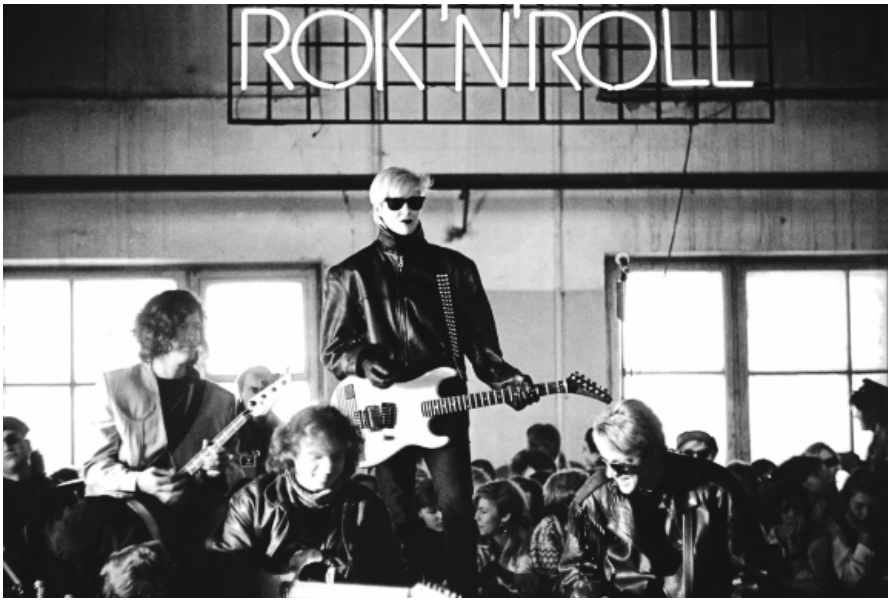
"STINGRAY BEHIND BARS!!"

The headline in the newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* caught my attention immediately.

"At 1 p.m. today, workers at the MosFilm studios were shocked by a whole mob of girls in black glasses and long-haired youth in fashionable clothes. Thirty young types of both genders sacrificed their day of studies to take part in a new video clip of Joanna Stingray," I read aloud. "The action takes place in the years of stagnation, which were symbolized with bars put all around the pavilion by the director, Misha Khleborodov. Some of the musicians who participated in the clip, which will be shown on the new TV program *Video Peak*, were musicians from Brigada S, Mega Police, and Message."

The end of 1991 wasn't slowing down as it raced towards the next year, and now that I could see such a growing fan base I tried to incorporate them in some of my plans. My third music video with the director Khleborodov was to the song "Rock Club," which was written with Games. The song was a celebration of the Leningrad Rock Club. Khleborodov got Misha Mukasey as the cameraman, a young and lanky guy whose father was a famous cinematographer in the U.S.S.R.

The video was simple, a stage behind a fence in an empty warehouse. A neon light spelling out *Rok'n' Roll* hung above us. They'd tried to do the sign in English but had misspelled the first word. I loved it.



■ On the stage set for my "Rock Club" music video directed by Misha Khleborodov, January 30, 1992.

A bunch of the best guitarists and drummers[9] joined me for the shoot. I always loved when it was me and the boys. It made me feel strong and tough but still feminine in comparison. It was just the best.

Mario Samolea was working on the production team. He was the one who had found all the rocker musicians in it. As I walked up to the group, they all smiled at me, a cigarette hanging from each one of their mouths.

Behind the stage is where we put all the fans and look-a-likes. I stood above them playing my Kramer guitar embossed with two flags and singing into a red mic stand. We shot so many takes at so many different angles. For the bridge we had the fans holding up their lighters and a *Save the World* banner.

The thing I remember most from the shoot was this one punk guitarist with blond hair, dark glasses, black leather, and skull rings licking all his fingers. I thought he was so cute and edgy.

My fan Lyuda was, of course, part of the shoot, and remembers not washing her face for a week after I kissed her cheek with my black lips. She seemed to be everywhere I was and had even stopped by my apartment on her fifteenth birthday. I'd given her a

9 Sergey Galanin, Kirill Trusov, Oleg Nesterov, Viktor Zinchuk, Artem Pavlenko, Igor Yartsev and Pavel Kuzin

■ *Thinking Till Monday* record cover with my collage over a landscape painting by Boris.

■ Signing *Walking Through Windows* for a fan, Moscow, September 14, 1991. Photo by Alexander Nemenov.

signed photograph and a Soviet and American flag on a stand. I loved seeing her glowing, beaming face, which gave me an idea to put together a contest to spend a day with a few of my fans in Moscow. I edited a video promo for the contest and begged my manager Timur to do the voiceover.

"And you! Are you a fan of Joanna Stingray? If you are, you can be one of the three lucky winners of the 'One Day with Stingray' competition! To mark the release of Joanna's new album *Walking Through Windows* we're giving three lucky winners of the competition a chance to meet Joanna in Moscow, have a meal with her at a Pizza Hut restaurant and play bowling with her and her friends. Isn't it cool? Each of the three lucky winners will also receive an official t-shirt, a baseball cap, a badge, an autographed poster, a tour billboard, photographs, three albums released in the U.S.S.R. – *Joanna Stingray*, *Thinking Till Monday*, *Walking Through Windows* – and her American 1983 record. And finally, they will receive a backstage pass to any of Joanna's concerts. So, how can you have One Day with Stingray? First, you should be a Joanna Stingray fan. You may or may not look like Joanna. You may be large or small, but you have to be a Joanna fan. Second, you should send a postcard with your name, age, address and telephone number to the address: Joanna Stingray Fan Club, Post Restante, K-9, Moscow, 103009. All letters and postcards should be posted before December first this year. They all will be placed in a bag and on Friday the twentieth of December, three winning postcards will be revealed on the *OBOZ* TV program. And if you are lucky, you will spend One Day with Stingray! One Day with Stingray! It's fantastic!"

■ Stills from the music videos for “Danger” (top, middle) and “Steel Wheels” (below), directed by Fedor Bondarchuk.

■ Getting pulled off the stage by fans until my bodyguards intervened, Moscow, 1992.

Kremlin, and one of my favorite venues. The whole place was packed, and as I sang, I could hear everyone singing along with me, our voices echoing against the high, flat ceiling. The sound system was better quality than I had played on before, and the sound engineer was incredibly professional and skilled. The lighting guy, too, was really good. As I danced around the stage, I'd see the stage turn different colors and see smoke blow through, which added such a fun vibe to the show. The backdrop was a life-size image of myself with my signature at the bottom, hanging over the stage.

The first night, the kids all left their seats and crowded up around the stage. Some even sat on the edge, their legs dangling and their torsos angled towards me. I loved having them so close and watching their lips move with my lyrics. A few times I got physically pulled into the audience. I could tell it scared Timur and the other guards as they frantically would run over and pull me out.

For "Tsoi Song," I voluntarily headed down into the crowd and had them sing the "ye mans" with me. They roared like beasts every time I sang the part "Tsoi, Tsoi," and it echoed through the room.

At the second show I was surprised to climb onto the stage and see a barrier between the stage and seats. Lyuda remembered this.

"The second day everything was changed – there was a big gap between us and the stage. I thought you didn't like us to be that close to you."

■ "Proliferate Free Speech, Not Plutonium! Greenpeace."

gravity of what we were doing. Thank goodness the altercation didn't last long.

We stood there, calmly waiting and hoping that we'd get results for our action before we'd get arrested. Thomas Schultz and Shaun Burnie from Greenpeace International were inside the Embassy speaking to the new British Ambassador Sir Brian Fall, and as we craned our necks outside to try and see through the imposing windows, I heard another car pull up, then another. The press had shown up and began shouting questions at Dima. He commented on the irony of being able to demonstrate in the former Evil Empire but not in the mother of democracies, the United Kingdom.

I was interviewed by the *Moscow Guardian*. "I'd worked with Greenpeace in the U.S.," I explained to them. "Having lived in Moscow during pre-*glasnost* days, the concept of freedom of speech is especially important to me."

An hour or so after we had arrived, the British Ambassador promised to communicate Greenpeace's concerns to the British Government. At that, the protest was ended. I felt relief flood my body. The whole experience had made me feel acutely human and aware of the solidarity of being on this earth together. We had to fight for each other and what we had.

In addition to sending a message to England, the success of the peaceful protest showed the Russian people that they had a right to speak up in their own evolving nation. I will never forget the feeling I had walking around the rest of the day, an intense satisfaction and pride in this country that had become my second home.

■ “More Than Enough” video shoot with me and Sasha.


■ Me and my daughter Madison at my twentieth anniversary concert at B2, Moscow, 2004.

fidgeting by the side of the stage.

"*Idi syuda*!" I called to her. "Come here!"

She crawled up on the stage with her scarf and unblinking eyes.

"Sing the Russian ditty you know so well," I told her. "*Pust vsigda budyet solntse*" – "May there always be sunshine."

That evening at the concert, Sasha Lipnitsky introduced Little Stingray. She stood there in my dark, circular sunglasses as the crowd cheered her on. A cappella, she sang the four lines in Russian and then in English, her thin, angelic voice smoothing out every line. In that moment, I knew she was damned to the twisted, whimsical world of music and performing that I loved so much.

At the end of my set, the blues guitarist Sergey Voronov joined me on stage for a version of "Come Together." Madison also joined in on the choruses. I'd forgotten how much I loved to perform, how much I missed the shine of the lights against the stage and the faint thumping of a thousand hearts beating together.

There are two photos from the concert hanging up in my home today. In one, I'm sitting on the edge of the stage with Madison with fans handing me flowers, touching my clothes, and asking for autographs. Madison's face is a painting of confusion and shock. In the second photo, Madison is tugging my arm in the middle of my set, stretching on her tiptoes to whisper a question in my ear and ignoring the crowd leaning in against the stage. Both of these remind me of the lives I was straddling, this rockstar history and this maternal responsibility. I'm so lucky I had a chance to have both.

◆ ETERNAL MEMORY ◆

to those who left our world too early
and whose life and work
enriched my years in Russia

VIKTOR TSOI
SERGEY KURYOKHIN
GEORGY “GUSTAV” GURYANOV
TIMUR NOVIKOV
SASHA VASILYEV
ANDREI KRISANOV
KOLYA VASIN
ALEXANDER BASHLACHEV
GRYSHA SOLOGUB
MARIANNA TSOI
MIKE NAUMENKO
ANDREY “DIUSHA” ROMANOV
MIKHAIL FEINSTEIN
SLAVA ZADERI
ALEXANDER AKSENOV “RIKOSHET”
SASHA KONDRASHKIN
ANDREY PANOV “SVINYA”
VLADISLAV MAMYSHEV “MONRO”
VLADIMIR LIPNITSKY
OLEG KOLOMEICHUK “GARIK ASSA”
ARKADY DRAGOMOSHCHENKO
IGOR CHUMECHKIN
SERGEY SAVELYEV
KSENIA SAVELIEVA-NOVIKOVA
IRINA GOSLITZ KASPARYAN
TAMARA VICTOROVNA FALALAYEVA
NINA VICTOROVNA PLANSON
LIZA KURYOKHIN
EGOR LETOV
PAUL DELPH
ANDY WARHOL
DAVID BOWIE

AND MY WONDERFUL MOTHER
JOAN NICHOLAS

■ Madison and Joanna Stingray, St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square, Moscow, April 2019.