



READING GROUP GUIDE

Red Wave: An American in the Soviet Music Underground

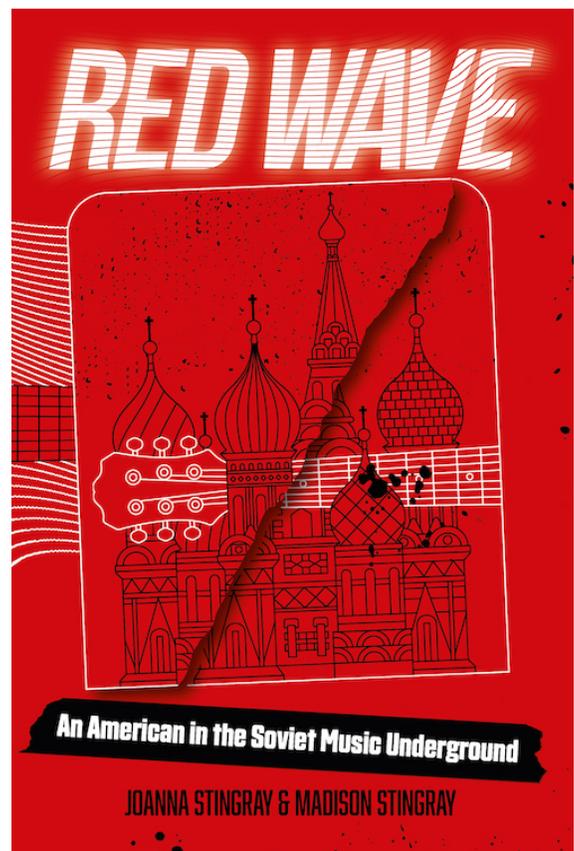
By Joanna Stingray and Madison Stingray

Introduction

Joanna Stingray's inspiring and poetic memoir, written with her singer/songwriter daughter Madison, introduces Western audiences to the legendary musicians of Soviet rock through her improbable Cold War heroics as a young New Wave musician who, in 1985, produced an album of smuggled music, *Red Wave: 4 Underground Bands from the USSR*. This is her incredible testimony of youthful fortitude and rebellion, her love story, and proof of the power of music and youth culture over stagnancy and oppression.

An American who almost single-handedly introduced Soviet rock to the free world... Stingray, who wrote this memoir with her daughter, Madison, nicely captures her daring amid an atmosphere of liberation and fear, and she's a study in moxie and enthusiasm.

– Kirkus Reviews



The story of the American musician who opened the clandestine world of Leningrad punk and rock 'n' roll to the West



PRAISE

Wild and vivid – a rollicking memoir of romance and rock ‘n’ roll in an era of upheaval and transition. From Los Angeles to Leningrad and back again, Joanna’s story is borne along by her infectious, headlong enthusiasm. It’s quite a ride.

– Patrick Radden Keefe, award winning staff writer at *The New Yorker* and author of *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland*

“You are the mother of Russian rock!” a fan shouted as Stingray promoted her new autobiography at a Moscow bookstore. [...] The California musician aroused the suspicions of the KGB and the FBI as she bravely championed the Soviet underground in the 1980s. The Red Wave LP, released in America introduced western audiences to Russian rock and helped end the Kremlin’s censorship of homegrown groups.”

– **The Guardian**

Joanna Fields was born in California brought up to mistrust Communism, so as soon as she could, in 1984 she went to the Soviet Union. She met underground rock musicians like Boris Grebenshchikov and his band Akvarium, banned from releasing music or playing official concerts and thought someone should get their music out to the West. Joanna has now written an account of her tape smuggling years as she shuttled across the Iron Curtain and released a groundbreaking double LP called Red Wave, featuring four underground bands and music that many in the West simply thought didn’t exist. Of course she needed a code name. She chose Stingray.

– **BBC Newsday, *Rock ‘n’ roll through the Iron Curtain***

Business and cultural pioneers don’t set out to light the world on fire but end up doing so through ingenuity and determination. While we often think of globalization as factories and container ships, the exchange of goods and ideas between nations starts with one person finding something people in another nation would value. Joanna Stingray was that one person who brought Soviet rock music to America and did so in remarkable fashion.

– **Forbes**



READING GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Boris and Seva agreed to meet with Joanna and Judy even though it was illegal and dangerous to meet with foreigners under Communism. What do you think Boris and Seva believed they had to gain that made it worth risking to see the American friends of a friend?
2. Viktor Tsoi said that “every person has a feeling that they are in a [mental] cage sometimes.” Even though it is easy to laud America in comparison to Russia and its rigid, abusive political history, no country is perfect in its structure and consequently in its society. What are the most prevalent mental cages that trap people in America then and today?
3. Would you risk your life and your livelihood to pursue the existence of music? Why or why not? What makes it so powerful that people could not live without it, even when their governments told them they must?
4. There is some obvious struggle and tension between Joanna and her mom as Joanna pursues this rogue path that deviates from the expected future her mom hoped she would have. What do you think a parent’s’ role might be if they are in the position of Joan and torn between supporting or protecting their child? What would you or wouldn’t you do if it were your own daughter?
5. What appear to be the biggest cultural differences between America and Russia as seen through Joanna’s eyes? What appears to be most similar? If you had to answer that question through your own eyes in the context of today, what do you see as the biggest differences and similarities?
6. What did you learn about challenges for people in the Soviet Union and how they compare to problems that Americans face? How do the different people in the book think about their lives in the Soviet Union and how do they compare themselves to America and Americans?
7. Andy Warhol gifts “the guys” in Russia signed Campbell’s Soup cans, that some of the rockers end up opening and eating. How do you think the artistic mind is enhanced or eroded by suffering, stress, and survival? What examples of this come out in the text?
8. In what sense did *glasnost* and the opening of Russia under Gorbachev change the relationships between Joanna and the rockers? Why did such a big cultural and political shift impact that scene of people, and in other ways, not manage to?



8. Was America as ready for the Russian rock scene as Russia was for the American rock music and influence? Obviously politics had a huge role in shaping both collective mindsets, but what else could have been at play?

9. *My roof is moving* is a Russian idiom to describe an overwhelming of the senses that make it hard to function. Yuri uses this phrase in the book, but it is applicable to just about everyone's experiences at times. What are some examples in the book where it seems a character's roof is moving, and why is that happening to them in that moment? What about Joanna Stingray's entire experience in the book gives illustration to this phrase?

10. Loss is a huge theme in this story, both in positive ways — the loss of Communism, the loss of fear, the loss of anonymity — and in detrimental ways, including the loss of immigration permissions, loss of freedom, loss of friends. Which ones resonated for you, and how would you have coped in those situations? How did the book make you feel and understand those losses?

11. Why do you think Viktor Tsoi, like other rockstars who die too young, manage to stay alive in the cultural mindset for so many generations? Do conspiracy theories have anything to do with fueling that fire, and if so, what are some examples of other rocker-legend conspiracy theories? Do you think conspiracy theories about Viktor Tsoi are plausible? What about your general knowledge of his time and place make you believe so?

12. The gender divide is a subtle but powerful dynamic in the book, as Joanna is the only female in a large group of male musicians and artists. How do you think gender plays a role in the relationships outlined in the book? What qualities did she bring to the art and music in her circle that allowed her to carve out a unique place there, and how much of that is related to gender vs. culture?

13. Boris Grebenshchikov is more than just a Russian deity to his fans. What does Boris represent beyond the image of the rogue rocker?

14. Who wielded power at the Rock Club? How?

15. Considering all aspects of "state control" experienced by Joanna, from the KGB, FBI, consulates and police to immigration and border control officials and other "Petty Men," how has her view of politics been shaped? What similarities exist with the rockers' views?

16. Is this memoir purely from memory? How much of it is documentary and how much is a kind of fiction, like the recreated conversations? How does having two writers complicate the idea of memoir? Think specifically about this mother-daughter writer's team, and when Madison becomes her own separate character toward the end of the book.



Joanna Stingray is an author and musician from Los Angeles, California, who lived for many years in Russia. In 1984, while touring in the Soviet Union, she met and befriended Boris Grebenschikov, a revered musical poet (who many Soviets called the 'Russian Dylan') and soon became the first American producer of underground Russian rock n' roll when she released the double album *Red Wave – 4 Underground Bands from the U.S.S.R.*, a compilation of music smuggled out of the U.S.S.R. by Joanna in 1985. A frequent traveler in and out of Russia, Joanna was interrogated by the KGB and FBI (both thought she was a spy) and in 1987, she became an enemy of the State – her visa blocked to keep her from entering the Soviet Union to marry Leningrad guitarist Yuri Kasparyan.

After months of intervention by the U.S. State Department, she returned to Russia, married Yuri and in the early '90s became a television host, a recording artist, and well known rock personality throughout Russia. She has published several books in Russia about her time in the music scene as well as much of her photo collection. Her video diaries and interviews of bands and their musicians is the only archive of this clandestine, bygone world.

Stingray's *Red Wave* is, in fact, credited by Russians for helping pave the way to the cultural opening that collapsed state control. Months after it appeared in the United States, Mikhail Gorbachev decided the *Red Wave* bands should be allowed to become "official," launching the bands to notoriety by 1987.



Madison Stingray expresses herself as a storyteller. She has written songs, poems, short stories, and now two full length books, the common theme of all her work being a strong female narrative and an attempt at human solidarity. She graduated from Georgetown University magna cum laude and received her Master's degree in Archaeology from the University of Cambridge in England. Growing up, the Leningrad Underground Rock days were stories that became her fairytales, and her contribution to putting those adventures in print is to inspire others that extraordinary things can happen to anyone who fights for something. Her first album, "*Stingray – In Your Eyes*" is out on iTunes, Spotify and others. Check her out on iamstingray.com.



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DoppelHouse Press is based in Los Angeles, a home to many exiles and immigrants from all over the world, which makes us further able to reflect on global conditions, cultures, politics, and crises that disperse creative people to new homelands, where they often flourish, transform local vernaculars, and influence future generations. in the form of memoirs and biographies, monographs, critical texts, and select fiction.

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Red Wave: An American in the Soviet Music Underground

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September 2020.

Paperback.

416 pages, 150 black and white illustrations

\$26.95 | 9781733957922 (pb)

Ebook also available.