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Rock ‘n’ Roll in the Soviet Union 1955-1991: Reflections of a Divided Society

By

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In December of 1991, German rock band the Scorpions met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in a private meeting in the Kremlin.¹ This marked the first meeting between a Soviet leader and any rock band in history. Rock ‘n’ roll finally gained the unquestioned acceptance of a Soviet leader, even if it was in the wake of a coup. At the meeting Gorbachev and the band discussed the current events and music. Their main focus was the Scorpions’ newest single “Wind of Change”; a power ballad about the changing political tide under the deposed leader and its liberalizing effects on Soviet society.² According to Klaus Meine (lead singer of the band) the group met “because of the song that hit the spirit of the time perfectly. ‘Wind of change’ blew us into the Kremlin.”³ The song was the basis for the meeting and served a familiar connection between the musicians and the leader. In welcoming this Western band to a friendly meeting at the Kremlin, Gorbachev symbolically accepted rock ‘n’ roll in to Soviet society, something no other Soviet official had done before. The Soviet leader recognized Western rock ‘n’ roll legitimacy as a music genre as well as its important social and political role in the Soviet Union.

The narrative surrounding rock ‘n’ roll and the Soviet authorities developed from an erratic and sometimes confusing history of rock ‘n’ roll in the USSR. In the words of leading Soviet rock historian Timothy Ryback, “It has been a conflict measured in watts and decibels rather than megatons.”⁴ Similar to the history of the Soviet Union, rock ‘n’ roll in the eastern bloc had its highs and lows; its good times and bad times. Originally influenced by Western artists, the Soviet context only served to enhance the rebellious nature of the music. Official denunciation and government restrictions plagued listeners and musicians alike as the

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² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
Communist authorities struggled to maintain ideological supremacy. To them, rock was associated with democracy and capitalism, and therefore had no place in Soviet society. At this early stage, rock’s status in society reflected the disdain for Western culture found in the elites of Soviet society. Despite official rejection, popularity grew, and rock ‘n’ roll developed a social and political function. As time digressed, changes in Soviet authority and global politics resulted in a much more open and collaborative society. In turn, rock ‘n’ roll transformed to embody and reflect the openness of society. For most of its existence in the Soviet Union rock ‘n’ roll was a symbol of the West and negatively expressed Soviet life. However, when society liberalized under Gorbachev’s reforms, rock music gained the freedom to be a successful basis for communication and collaboration. Ultimately, Soviet rock’s journey to legitimacy and international recognition reflected the USSR’s evolution from a society of complete isolation to one of relative openness and freedom.

Similar to other cultural aspects of Soviet life, the political happenings of the time period had a lasting effect on rock ‘n’ roll. As such, the Cold War events that directly influenced Soviet society had indirect effects of the status and function of rock ‘n’ roll. Starting in the wake of World War II, tensions between the Soviets and the West worsened. In an effort to maintain peace, the leading post-WWII super powers (USSR, United States, France, and England) divided up the former Nazi controlled Germany between themselves. At the center of this complex political situation was the German capital, Berlin. Initially, dialogue between the powers was positive and the result was an equal division of Berlin into four quadrants, one for each power. However, as East-West relationships soured on account of the lack of reparations awarded to the USSR by the United States, dialogue became increasingly hostile. In 1946 and in response to these hostilities, the three Western powers combined their quadrants to form one unified zone
with one currency. The Soviet response was to cut East Berlin (as well as all of East Germany) off from the West. In 1948, the East German (Soviet backed) government built the Berlin Wall, effectively isolating East Germany from West Germany. This set up a definitive geographical marker for where the democratic West ended and the isolated, Soviet controlled East began. The creation of Berlin Wall symbolized the ideological differences between the West (the United States, England, and France to a limited extent) and the Soviet Union. Ingrained in the struggle for geographic and military dominance was the battle for ideological dominance and the superior way of life. The Soviet Union endorsed and promoted communism and its belief in an authoritative central government, whereas the West endorsed capitalism and a government that purposefully contributed to the freedom of its people. The result was two vastly different societies. Interestingly, a unique relationship between the two developed during the Cold War. Despite their ideological differences and the geographic gap, the two societies came in contact to the extent that Western culture influenced Soviet culture. This influence stretched over various aspects of Soviet culture, especially in radio, cinema, and consumer goods (Coca Cola to name one). Interestingly, the aspect of Western culture that Soviets connected with the most was music, specifically rock ‘n’ roll.

To gain an understanding of Soviet rock ‘n’ roll, one must start at the beginning of Western rock ‘n’ roll in 1950s America. As the Cold War went in the direction of a nuclear arms race after the end of the Korean War and Stalin’s death, rock ‘n’ roll musicians such as Chuck

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6 Ibid.
Berry and Little Richard created the first variations of rock ‘n’ roll in the American south.\(^8\) Based heavily on African American R & B traditions, these artists created a sound that captivated hordes of fans, white and black alike. It was in this initial moment that rock ‘n’ roll gained a sense of progressive social expression. In a time of intense racial divisions, the music of these two artists brought blacks and whites together under the common umbrella of rock ‘n’ roll.\(^9\) The music genre took another step towards widespread fandom through the music of Elvis Presley. His combination of African American blues and country/western styles captivated millions of young fans, much to the dismay of moral leaders.\(^10\) Elvis was undoubtedly popular, but it came at a price. The government, supported by the press and other authorities (parents and churches to name two) actively spoke out against Elvis and his music. Historian David P. Szatmary, in his book *Rockin’ in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*, explains that Elvis was blamed for the “moral corruption of youths” due to his overtly sexual stage antics while performing.\(^11\) This served to reinforce rock ‘n’ roll’s association with counter culture and bad behavior. Elvis was fundamental in bringing rock into mainstream American society as well as stigmatizing it with association to subversive culture; however, another was responsible for bringing it onto the international level.

Bill Haley was a country-western artist turned rocker during the early 1950s. Predating Elvis as a professional singer, Haley did not experience fame until his 1955 release of the single “Rock Around the Clock.” This song became fundamental in bringing rock ‘n’ roll onto a global level. Due to the song’s popularity in the United States, Haley was featured in a movie (by the

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\(^9\) Ibid. 20.

\(^10\) Ibid. 42.

\(^11\) Ibid. 48.
same name as the song) as well as an international tour. The movie “Rock Around the Clock” acted as a precursor to Haley’s tour. Upon its 1956 European release, it quickly became one of the most popular movies of the year. However, the popularity was not always positive. The Times (a London based newspaper) reported on several situations in which continual riots associated with the film “led more than a dozen cities and towns to ban the film.” Evidently, rock ‘n’ roll had the power to rile up crowds and create pandemonium. Despite the rioting caused by the film and its subsequent banning, Haley still went on tour in Europe. A 1956 publication of the Chicago Daily Tribune announced that Haley’s tour would begin in the year 1957 and stop in France, England, Ireland, Belgium, and Scotland. Haley and rock ‘n’ roll as a musical genre gained exposure to a large population of European citizens. His act was well received, predominantly by youths who had seen the movie. The New York Times recorded observations from Haley’s performance in London during February of 1957. The reporter recalls “more than 2,000 youths gave Bill Haley…a frenzied reception when he arrived in London today…” Haley’s presence incited similar reactions as the movie. Youths flocked to see the source of the new rock ‘n’ roll sound. This excitement and fervor reflected the new hold that rock had over English society as well as others in Europe. Despite its popularity among the youths, rock ‘n’ roll carried the similar stigma of counter culture as it did in the United States. In fact, some of

13 Ibid.
Haley’s concerts and the showings of the movie ended in riots and arrests.\textsuperscript{16} Evidently, rock ‘n’ roll had similar results across the Atlantic. In bringing rock ‘n’ roll to Western Europe, Haley brought the genre to the doorstep of the Soviet Union and to the attention of both its citizens and authorities.

As Western European youths rocked to the performances of Bill Haley, Soviet youths experienced their own sort of culture shock. In 1957 the Soviet government hosted the Sixth World Youth Festival. Featured in the event were international “jazz musicians, beatnik poets, modern artists…even political activists.”\textsuperscript{17} Although this did not feature rock music specifically, this festival marked a unique moment in which the Soviet authorities allowed for diversity in both cultural and thought. American youths were also featured in the event. They were given the liberty to process into Lenin Stadium in Moscow waving an American flag; the symbol of the Soviet rivals.\textsuperscript{18} The festival exposed Soviet citizens to other societies and their cultures. It gave them a brief view of freedoms of other, capitalistic countries. The State, in allowing this event to happen, symbolically accepted alternate worldviews and ways of life. However, this acceptance of western cultures was not consistent throughout society. Even at this early point in the history of Soviet rock ‘n’ roll, the official Soviet press expressed reservations about Western music. The Soviet newspaper—\textit{Sovetskaya Kultura}—expressed “Rock ‘n’ roll is really just a dirty capitalist trick.”\textsuperscript{19} This initial association capitalism was negative and foreign. Rock ‘n’ roll was

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Artemy Troitsky, \textit{Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia} (London: Omnibus Press, 1987), 18.
seen as a ploy by distant Western businessmen to make money off of unsuspecting people. The press marginalized rock ‘n’ roll by focusing on its otherness. The article went on to report “Soviet Culture said, one finds that rock ‘n’ roll is ‘above all a tremendous goldbearing vein that brings enterprising, smart operators millions of dollars in profits.’” By connecting rock ‘n’ roll with commercial enterprise and individual profits, two ideas that were fundamental opposed in communist society, the press. Communism supports an economic system centered on strong governmental control, not privatization. Rock ‘n’ roll was a product of the capitalistic market and was a representation of Western ideals.

The Sixth World Youth Festival was a brief intermission in the Soviet government’s war on Western cultures. For a few days, representatives from Western countries were allowed to celebrate their cultures alongside the Soviet population. However, this trend did not continue, simultaneous with this brief acceptance, the Soviet authorities through the press, condemned Western rock ‘n’ roll as a money making “trick” thought of by scheming Western business men. Much to the dismay of the Communist authorities, this initial denunciation of rock ‘n’ roll did little to stop the flow of Western music into the Soviet Union. Rather, Soviet music followers developed their own capitalistic style black market for Western records. The phenomenon known as “records on ribs” began during the late 1950s as a way for Soviet rock fans to listen to Western musicians who were banned by the authorities. Artemy Troitsky, the leading expert of Soviet rock ‘n’ roll explained that these records “were actual X-ray plates…rounded at the edges with scissors, with a small hole in the centre.” Western music was incredibly sought after in the

https://search.proquest.com/cv_526673/docview/114042564/fulltextPDF/D2FB0108A63A4988PQ/2?accountid=14703

20 Ibid.
21 Troitsky, Back in the USSR, 19.
Soviet Union; however, it was also difficult to get. Only through illegal methods could Soviet fans experience the sounds of the West.

Black market music became available for Soviet listeners as early as the late 1950s. Using these “records on ribs,” two men by the name of Dmitri Pavlov and Viktor Krupin created one of the first music smuggling rings in the USSR. Their smuggling services resulted in “one of the largest Soviet black-market rings...[that] produced the records in home studios and sold them through agents in Siberia, the Ukraine and the Far North....”  

The ring served a large population within the Soviet Union; it was not concentrated to urban areas or certain ethnic provinces. It played a key role in bringing Western culture to every corner of the USSR. The records were also sold in many vacationing dance halls, such as ones on and around the Black Sea. Western music was used as relaxation; it catered to those who wanted to forget about the mundane of Soviet life. Rock ‘n’ roll became associated with letting loose and enjoying life. It was brief pause in the depressing Communist reality. Much to the dismay of Soviet authorities, “members of the Young Communist League were some of its active promoters and salesmen.” The Soviet authorities could not rely on its own organizations to uphold its ideals and oppose the West.

Rock’s appeal did not just capture someone who was at odds with the Soviet Union; rather it found a mainstream following, among the youths in particular. Rock ‘n’ roll in some situations served a similar role as popular music does today, as a source of enjoyment and relaxation. To the general public rock posed no immediate threat. Only through State intervention and official denunciation did rock ‘n’ roll become dissident and subversive. The two men caught distributing

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.
records were sentenced to two years in prison, their financier was sentenced to hard labor, and all others were given “other punishments.” In the war for ideological supremacy, rock ‘n’ roll’s Western origins gave it immense power. The music produced a rash and fearful response from the State. Rock’s patrons felt the wrath of the Communist state, not for the sale of music, but for their symbolic acceptance and support of democratic ideologies. The State wanted to take a hard-public stance; those who support or associate with ideologies other than their own have no place in society.

These men served as example of the State’s unflinching authority in matters of political dissidence. The Communist newspaper—Sovetskaya Kultura—originally published the story of these two smugglers and it received a lot of attention throughout the Soviet Union and its satellite states. It served as warning of the subversion of rock ‘n’ roll and those who promoted it. The Soviet Union, in criminalizing Western rock gave it more social power. Suddenly rock resisted the State; therefore, all those involved did so in opposition to State authority. Much of the Soviet Union was already exposed to lots of Western influences. The people already embraced Western art forms and had a yearning for Western music. According to the article, “the music merchants served a large and enthusiastic clientele.” As the decade turned and the 60s arrived, this population of rock loving Soviets only continued to grow and diversify. As the standard of living declined, parts of society became increasingly skeptical with the Communist authority. In turn, rock’s anti-communist stigma continued to grow.

The 1960s opened with new challenges to the relationship between East and West—Communist and Capitalist. Tensions arose in the new communist nation of Cuba. Under

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and with the help of the Soviet Union, Cuba became an international threat to democracy. The Cuba predicament culminated in October 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis.\(^{28}\) In response to the United States’ placement of nuclear warheads in Turkey, General Secretary of the Soviet Union -- Nikita Khrushchev -- struck a deal with Castro to place USSR created nuclear warheads on the island. With the threat of nuclear war in their hemisphere, the U.S. resorted to diplomacy. Through a series of indirect and direct correspondences, U.S. president John F. Kennedy and Khrushchev worked out an agreement to avoid military fallout or nuclear war.\(^{29}\) This marked a significant change in Soviet and American relations. After realizing how close they came to all-out nuclear war, the two leaders looked to more communicative means to avoid continued destruction; a trend that would continue over the next couple decades.

Although the 1960s fostered a better political relationship between the East and the West, Soviet society remained closed and opposed to Western ideas and cultures. Consequently, music of Western origin was not welcomed by the Soviet elites. Khrushchev was one of the most outspoken proponents against Western music. In a speech 1962, he stated “I don’t like jazz… I used to think it was static when I heard it on the radio.”\(^{30}\) Although not explicitly about rock ‘n’ roll, his words carried weight in the Union and negatively affected the standing of Western jazz and rock ‘n’ roll. His words set the tone for Western music. It was not a part of Soviet society and should not be tolerated. As a politically and socially conservative leader Khrushchev

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endorsed traditional Russian music. He felt that “we need music that inspires, that calls for heroic deeds and for constructive labor.”

Music was supposed to serve a particular function, one that rock and jazz failed to do. Music either supported communism and the worker’s paradise or it did not have the support of the State.

Khrushchev was not alone in his public opposition of Western music; in fact, during the 60s a number of elites spoke out against Western music, specifically rock ‘n’ roll. In fact, a trend of older Soviet leaders speaking out against Western music and promoting traditional Soviet music developed. One of these outspoken individuals was Igor Moiseyev, master and director of his famous self-named dance company. The New York Times reported on an article in Izvestia (one of the government newspapers) in which Moiseyev “deplored today the attraction of the youth of his country to ‘the disgusting dynamism of rock ‘n’ role and the twist.’”

He felt that rock ‘n’ roll and its dances were far too aggressive and wild. He was also concerned with the overt sexuality of rock ‘n’ roll and the twist saying, “anyone with healthy tastes is against their sexual character.” He linked rock ‘n’ roll and sexuality; something he clearly felt had no place in public society. Another elite in opposition was Mr. Khrennikov, head of the Soviet Composers Union since the rule of Stalin. In an interview with Izvestia, he explained, “[our nation needs] songs of responding social significance, songs of deep great feelings, capable of inspiring labor and heroic deeds.” He goes on to include that he felt that Western music had the capacity “to dissolve the artistic principle of socialist realism amid the currents and schools of modern

31 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
bourgeois decadence.”34 Evidently the older Soviet generations did not appreciate the new Western music forms. They viewed it as an entity with the power to divide their society and ultimately destroy it. These older Soviets were focused on music rooted in tradition, that is Russian/Soviet tradition. Not the tradition of the West, in the tradition of the enemy. Khrennikov reinforced the idea that music played a pivotal role in supporting the ideals of the State. In fact, every aspect of Soviet culture was fashioned to idealize the State and its past leaders. Rock ‘n’ roll, as a product of Western culture promoted values and ideas at odds with the Soviet state, for this reason it was rejected by the older generations. Despite this elite denunciation, rock ‘n’ roll lived on in the Soviet Union.

The decade of the 1960s featured one of the most important Western influences on the Soviet rock scene. Despite the lack of support from older generations and Khrushchev, rock ‘n’ roll survived and gained a following during the 60s. The sole reason for this phenomenon was The Beatles. Formed in Liverpool, England at the turn of the decade, The Beatles took the world by a storm and unfortunately for Soviet officials, their bloc was included. 35 The Beatles fundamentally changed rock ‘n’ roll into an international music industry. With their mop-top style haircuts and black or colorless garb, the Beatles’ unique look set the standard for the outward appearance of a rock band.36 More importantly, The Beatles captured and enhanced rock’s rebellious and progressive nature. Take for example the 1968 hit “Revolution” written by John Lennon. The opening verse reads:

You say you want a revolution
Well, you know
We all want to change the world.
You tell me that it’s evolution
Well, you know
We all want to change the world.\textsuperscript{37}

Perhaps the most explicit political songs ever released by the Beatles, “Revolution” was very purposeful in its message. The song suggested that the state of world society was dire and it needed to be changed. This was written at the height of the Vietnam War and it expressed the public’s frustration with the struggle.\textsuperscript{38} Their music conveyed the need for a fundamental change in the global political status quo. It suggested the need for a revitalized and new world order in which everybody was a part of. It gave the common person the power and inspiration to go out and make change. The Beatles ability to question authority as fundamental freedom of social expression (in a way that reached millions of people) became ingrained with rock ‘n’ roll. It became a mode for expressing political and social dissent; an aspect that had extreme importance in the Soviet rock tradition.

The Beatles were pivotal in the creation of a Soviet rock scene. Western music and rock ‘n’ roll already existed in the Soviet Union, but it gained an unprecedented amount of popularity with The Beatles. Their music was particularly popular among youths, who had gravitated towards rock ‘n’ roll due to its association with the West.\textsuperscript{39} As explained by Alexey S. Kozlov, “I felt blissful and invincible. All the depression and fear ingrained over the years disappeared. I

understood that everything other than The Beatles had been oppression.” The Beatles were an exposure to a different way of life, a different way of thinking. These young Soviets heard this music and recognized that there was a different, possibly better way of life. Kozlov identified as a stilyagi; a youth involved in counter culture that favored Western culture over Soviet culture. His words expressed the newfound freedom associated with The Beatles music. He literally felt a release upon hearing their music. This conveyed the generational division in the Soviet Union at this time. Youths felt that they had nowhere to go, nobody to connect with. They could not find an outlet for their frustration within the confines of their own society. Rock ’n’ roll in the form of The Beatles was the release they were looking for. Despite their popularity, The Beatles subject with an absolute ban that lasted until 1976 when the Soviet authorities purchased the rights to Paul McCartney’s song “Band on the Run.” The authorities looked to silence The Beatles and their positive representation of Western society. This official denunciation of The Beatles only contributed to their rebellious stigma in the USSR.

The sound of The Beatles had a particular importance to Soviets. Traditional Russian music consisted of classical and folk music, two genres with intrinsic rhythm and melodies. Infamous Russian rock critic Artemy Troitsky explained that “the Beatles had melodies, and for the Russian ear this is mandatory.” The Beatles seamless transitions between verses and unique ability to harmonize the three distinct voices of McCartney, Lennon, and Harrison catered to the classic Russian music forms. The unique sound that captivated all of Western society found a

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40Troitsky, Back in the USSR, 23.
41 Ibid. 23.
43 Mitter, Across the Blocs, 5.
44 Troitsky, Back in the USSR, 23.
new fan base in the citizens of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Beatles were fundamental to Soviet rock ‘n’ roll. Their unique message coupled with their melodious sound captivated millions of Soviet fans and laid the groundwork for the creation of a unique Soviet rock experience.

Rock ‘n’ roll gained popularity and garnered a larger following with The Beatles. The influx of Western music alarmed the conservative Khrushchev administration and in 1964 the State sanctioned record company under the Ministry of Culture called Melodiya. Its initial aim was to allow the government complete control over all aspects of the music industry as well as foster a love for traditional Russian music among Soviet citizens. Melodiya became a key player in dividing music between unofficial and official. Unofficial bands did not work with Melodiya and did not have the support of the state. Likewise, official bands worked with the state record company and were able to use their recording studios as well as preform open concerts.

Melodiya played a key role in creating official music groups. The first state sponsored rock bands were known as vocal instrumental ensembles (VIAs) and they resembled jazz ensembles more than our understanding of a Western rock band. The first of these bands to receive official recognition from Melodiya was the “Happy Guys”, a band from Moscow created in 1966. Due to a large amount of success in the underground and its reception of a laureate of the All-Union contest, Happy Guys gained official recognition from Melodiya in 1968. Interestingly, all the Happy Guys songs released by Melodiya relayed the message that the state of Soviet affairs was fine. The State wanted music that supported its rule and legitimized its power. it did this by not only controlling the flow of Western music into the nation, but also

46 Ibid.
controlling the production and distribution of native bands. The idea was that in allowing a limited amount of Western music, the wants and needs of society would be met and rock would lose its rebellious nature and become unpopular in Soviet society. These early bands were aimed at satisfying the society’s rock ‘n’ roll needs. Authorities could allow rock ‘n’ roll to exist as part of the State and the Communist experience, while simultaneously exercising control over the art form.

The 1960s were a time of relative acceptance for Western music genres. Despite police raids on smuggling rings and State control over the music industry, Western songs continued to stream into the Soviet Union and popular Western bands continued to find new fans. During the late 60s Soviet fans enjoyed the new sounds of Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd, and Elton John.48 Soviet citizens gained exposure and influence from a wide variety of Western musicians. However, these times of relative freedom did not last forever. Events surrounding the Cold War directly affected the Soviet population and their cultural agency. At the end of the decade the Soviet Union experienced backlash from various satellite states throughout Europe and Asia that sent waves of unease and fear through the Soviet authorities and its citizens. In 1968 a reform movement known as the “Prague Spring” challenged communisms hold over Eastern Europe. Under Alexander Dubček, the Czechoslovakian experienced economic reform and political liberalization.49 Leonid Brezhnev (the Soviet leader who usurped Khrushchev in 1964) responded with military force and adopted the Brezhnev Doctrine, a piece of legislation that required socialist states under the USSR to remain within the Marxist-Leninist sphere as well as demanding that all other Soviet sphere countries assist in the

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48 Troitsky, Back in the USSR, 33.
49 Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 239.
protection of Soviet power in Eastern Europe and Asia. The Prague Spring alerted Soviet authorities to the growing threat of political dissidence in the Soviet Union. There was a viable population of communist elites within the Soviet sphere who were willing to risk the wrath of the USSR for the implementation of more democratic policies. It also had extensive effects over regular society. According to historian John Gaddis, the brief pause in Communist ideological domination fostered a dual identity for some. They publically endorsed communism while privately supporting alternate, possibly democratic ideals. This situation alerted people to a more Western way of thinking and the possibility of more democratic style leadership.

The events of the Prague Spring directly influenced Soviet society of the 1970s. The situations in East Asia and Eastern Europe caused Soviet leaders to tighten their grip on society. Under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Union appeared to be more politically and socially conservative as well as more intolerant to Western music than under the Khrushchev regime. Military action was no longer sole method for the consolidation of Soviet power. Rather, Communist authorities looked back to their history of propaganda and ideological control. The Prague Spring proved that alternate ideas and theories about how to construct society were present behind the Iron Curtain. Soviet authorities needed to respond accordingly. During the 1970s the Soviet Union focused more time and effort on promoting communist ideologies and destroying anyone or anything that stood against them. Brezhnev and his colleagues looked to

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tighten their grip on the arts, media, and political dissent in Soviet society.53 On the international front, the 1970s featured more communication between the Soviet Union and the West. Leonid Brezhnev embraced détente (meaning relaxation) and sought to create a working relationship with Richard Nixon and the United States. He believed that less tension with the Americans could result in access to Western technology and eventually stimulate the economy.54 The Soviets wanted an end to the arms race and establish peace to revitalize domestic life. In 1972 the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) produced the Antiballistic Missile Treaty, marking a significant shift towards compromise and away from conflict.55 Brezhnev’s goal of bettering relations with the United States became real.

Soviet rock critic Artemy Troitsky deemed the years between 1970-72 as an important epoch in the popularization of rock ‘n’ roll into mainstream Soviet society. He recalled that a certain Western rock opera called “Jesus Christ Superstar” changed the way that Soviet viewed rock ‘n’ roll.56 Prior to this rock ‘n’ roll functioned mainly in youth and counterculture movements, but this opera presented rock ‘n’ roll in way that appealed much more to the general Soviet population. It catered to Russia’s love of classical music while also utilizing rock ‘n’ roll. Jesus Christ Superstar continued the trend of Western musicians as pivotal influences on the Soviet rock scene. With society, much more open to Western rock, the stage was set for an explosion in the number and diversity of bands and messages conveyed in lyrics. In the 60s, Soviet musicians were full of energy and life, they were enamored with the newness of rock ‘n’ roll and The Beatles dominated the rock ‘n’ roll scene. Soviet musicians did little to experiment

54 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 242.
with different sounds and styles of the music genre. However, by the 70s, rock ‘n’ roll established itself as an underground art form. Artists began to adapt and evolve rock ‘n’ roll to their own traditions.

Up until the 1970s bands almost exclusively performed covers of popular Western songs; including songs by newer artists like Santana and Jimi Hendrix. This trend continued with most of the bands performing at the time. However, one group took an unprecedented step towards fostering a Russian identity within the music. Time Machine (Mashina Vremeni) fundamentally changed Soviet rock ‘n’ roll through the implementation of the Russian language into their music. The lyricist and lead guitarist was Andrey Makarevich, a curly haired former student at the Moscow Institute of Architecture.\(^57\) His background as an academic and experience in school helped shape the themes of his music. He sang of the struggles of everyday Soviet life as well as the mental burdens he endured as a youth, unsatisfied with his life and future prospects.

Rather than directly assault communist ideologies, Makarevich took a subtler approach. His song “Is it you, is it me” expressed the boredom and lack of excitement of living in the Soviet Union. The first line reads, “Everything’s plain, fairytales lie.” Short and to the point, Makarevich shatters any sense of illusion of the fantastical. He conveyed his lack of enjoyment in his current life situation. The next line says, “The fog hid the place where the sun island lies.” He used weather as a metaphor for his lack of ability to find meaning and enjoyment in life. He felt like the society in which he lived limited his prospects for freedom and success. The next line of the song invokes a feeling of hopelessness, it reads, “Castles in the air that no one can build.” He conveyed a lack of determination to achieve something outside the Communist experience. Soviet life did not foster the imagination or thinking outside the box. The final line

of the verse reads, “Somebody’s wrong- is it you, is it me?”\textsuperscript{58} He ended the verse in self-flection, trying to find a source for the overwhelming negativity in his life.

Time Machine was considered one of the most popular Russian bands starting in the 1970s. Originally formed as a Beatles-style band, their sound evolved as it drew from all the popular Western bands of the 70s, Led Zeppelin and Cream to name two.\textsuperscript{59} The band was very popular throughout the 70s and garnered a large following from within the Soviet Union. However, their dark criticisms of Soviet life garnered them an extensive amount of negative attention from the authorities.\textsuperscript{60} Underground music promoters who had once focused exclusively on bringing Western rock to the Soviet Union, instead turned their attention to this new distinctly Russian band. For the majority of the 70s, Time Machine operated underground and were unofficial in the eyes of the State. However, they still managed a large following of diehard fans. cassettes of their songs circulated in the millions by the late 1970s. Some examples of their most famous 1970s cassettes included the self-titled “Time Machine” released in 1978 and “The Sunny Island” released year later in 1979.\textsuperscript{61} The reason for this was owed to their appearance and style. Largely imitative of Western bands in sound and song structure, the same was true in terms of appearance. Take the 1979 ballad “While the Candle is Burning” (Пока горит свеча/ Пока горит свеча). Makarevich began the song with a slow intro accompanied with a single instrument in the background. In this case he played the piano. As the song progressed, other instruments were gradually added to form a full sound complete with all the instruments of

\textsuperscript{58} Andrey Makarevich, \textit{Is it you, is it me?} (Moscow, 1979), \url{http://russmus.net/song/5607#2}.
\textsuperscript{60} Troitsky, \textit{Back in the USSR}, 42.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 156.
Western rock. Although instruments are added, Makarevich’s squeaky, nasally voice, similar to that of Robert Plant (lead singer of Led Zeppelin) remained the primary focus of the song. Although, the tempo of the instrumental music increases at times, his singing remained slow and poignant.

The appearance of Time Machine also mimicked popular Western rock bands of the 70s. The group was comprised of four separate parts. At the head and on lead vocals was Makarevich. He primarily played the guitar however he loved the piano and many of his earlier songs; especially ballads featured his expert piano playing. Time Machine also featured a bass guitar. Alexander Kutikov began as the lead bassist starting in 1971 and has remained with the band until contemporary times. Kutikov also supplied backup vocals to Makarevich; a feature that Western bands utilized going back to big jazz band performances. The third part of Time Machine that was clearly influenced by Western bands was the drummer. The drummer position in Time Machine saw many different residents for most of the 70s, but in 1979 they finally found consistency in Valery Efremov. This eccentric young man being fit perfectly into the mold of a rock ‘n’ roll drummer. His stage antics and presence are unsurpassed by the other supporting instrumentalists in the band. His loose style when playing the drums rivaled the stoicism of Makarevich and Kutikov. His unruly stage presence and Western punk style expressed the idealized rocker in the minds of Soviet rock fans. While the other three members of the band dressed in tuxedos or quality dress shirts, Efremov dressed in a white t-shirt, blue jeans and jeans.

sneakers. These cloths were not of Soviet origin and expressed his acceptance of Western culture. Efremov wanted to look like a Western rock star and for good reason. He wanted to mimic popular European and American musicians, he wanted that association with Western culture. Rock ‘n’ roll was an overt display of ideologies that were at odds with fundamental Soviet values. Everything from the music, the clothes, even the way musicians acted on stage, owed tribute to the great bands of the West. Even the use of the tuxedo was reminiscent of Western style. The Beatles, for example, dressed in tuxedos in one of their first television gigs, on the Ed Sullivan Show. Everything about his appearance and unruly stage presence embodied the counter culture essence of rock ‘n’ roll in the Soviet Union.

The 70s rock scene was not exclusively dominated by Time Machine; in fact, there were a limited number of bands (official and unofficial) that circulated the rock scene after Time Machine’s initial creation. The most famous official band of the time was Flowers (Tsvety) lead by Stas Namn. Interestingly they received recognition from the State through an elite political connection from Stas and Melodiya released two of their songs. This group was a significant outlier for the rock ‘n’ roll scene. They failed to embody the rebellious essence of Soviet rock ‘n’ roll; rather, they catered to the State for fame. In the underground scene, the St. Petersburg-based Aquarium (Akvarium) lead by Boris Grebenshikov began to make a name for themselves. However, the majority of their music and fame came during the decade of the 1980s.

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65 Makarevich, “When the candle is burning”
67 Troistky, Back in the USSR, 40.
68 Ibid. 68.
By 1975 communication between the east in the spirit of détente, the Helsinki Final Act was signed by thirty-five different nations in attempts to promote cooperation in the European community and curb the effects of the Cold War. The act dealt with four major areas: political and military issues, economic issues, and human rights. The act fostered a better relationship with Western countries, especially in economic areas. The Helsinki Final Act was the culmination of a renewed effort for communication between the Soviet Union and the West and its success was reflected in rock music. In 1979 Elton John went on an eight-concert tour in the Soviet Union, including a performance in Moscow. This marked the first ever Soviet tour by a Western artist. As a result, his album “A Single Man” was released into the official record shops. The performance, although deemed “not real rock music—just Elton behind a white Steinway with Ray Cooper on percussion” by Artemy Troitsky (who was backstage at the event), exposed Soviet listeners to the sound and stage quality of Western performances. Soviet listeners experienced a true Western rock event. This was a momentous step in the acceptance of all rock ‘n’ roll. However, as the decade turned, Soviet authorities shifted their focus from Western rock music and on to the homegrown Soviet scene. The newfound expressiveness of rock ‘n’ roll (through the use of the Russian language) gave the music unprecedented power that would send waves of fear and worry through the Soviet government.

The year 1980 began with a momentous event for rock ‘n’ roll in the Soviet sphere of influence. The scene was a dark and stormy day in Tbilisi, an exotic city in the country of

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71 Troitsky, Back in the USSR, 46-47.
Georgia. The event was Tbilisi-80, hosted by the Georgian Philharmonia; an esteemed group of high ranking and influential musicians. The concert was a risky venture for a group who curried favor with Soviet authorities. To help them recruit rock musicians from all over the USSR, the Philharmonia called upon none other than Artemy Troitsky. Time Machine and Aquarium were the two main groups recruited by Troitsky. The festival was a chance for both unofficial bands to gain some official exposure and playing time. Interestingly, Time Machine prepared for the festival by creating music without any significant message. Rather than risk the chance to expose the public to the real essence of rock ‘n’ roll, they resorted to conformity.

On the other hand, Aquarium saw this as a chance to make their mark on the Soviet rock scene. The focus of Aquarium during their set was not the lyrical message, but rather the actual on-stage performance. The mastermind behind the display was Boris G (founder, leader sing, and lead guitarist). Dressed in a t-shirt lined with expletives, Boris’s obvious intention was to create a stir around the band. He wanted people to remember Aquarium for more than just their music. His stage antics were also a main point of contention. He began by stroking the guitar across his stomach while suggestively rocking his hips. This was followed by out of control running and prancing around the stage. He whipped his hair and kicked his feet to ignite the crowd. Then Aquarium did something unthinkable. Boris G played the guitar on the floor while lying on his back. Another band member stood over him so that Boris was in between his legs and proceeded to sexually suggestive movements (thrusting of the hips and backside mainly) while continuing

72 Troitsky, *Back in the USSR*, 212.
73 Ibid. 54.
74 Ibid. 56.
75 Ibid. 56.
to play his instrument. It was a bizarre scene, like nothing any Soviet had seen. There actions were hyper sexualized and caused quite a stir in the audience. Troitsky, who was at the event, recalls that during Aquarium’s act, the hosts of the event stood up in unison and walked out of the concert hall. They believed that Aquarium’s actions were homosexual and degenerative. One even asked Troitsky, “Why did you bring these faggots here?” To which he responded, “They’re normal guys. That’s just their stage show, a bit eccentric.” Aquarium’s performance embodied the rebellious nature of rock ‘n’ roll similar to that of Western rock ‘n’ roll. Boris did not cater to the will of authority; he did not allow the confines of a proper Soviet society hold him back. Rather, he acted on his own accord. The freedom of Boris G to act in an explicit manor while performing publically embodied the shift in the Soviet rock scene during the 1980s.

The 1980s featured far more diversity in the style of rock ‘n’ roll produced by Russian musicians. Aquariums’ performance at Tbilisi-80 gave them an immense amount of popularity in the underground scene. The group produced most of its music during the 1980s. Their 1982 song “25 to 10” expressed the feeling of despair associated with working a dead-end job. Their content dealt with the everyday mundaneness of Soviet life. “2-12-85-06” talked about the different type of people living in the Union and the grief of not being able to communicate properly with loved ones. Another song, “Ivanov,” examines life in communal housing through the eyes of a resident. The last two lines of the third verse read “And they spend their lives together, In comparative analysis of wine.” The lyrics were not as important to Aquarium as

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78 Troitsky, *Back in the USSR*, 58.
79 Boris Grebenshikov, “25 to 10” (Moscow, 1982), [http://russmus.net/song/4675#2](http://russmus.net/song/4675#2).
80 Boris Grebenshikov, “2-12-85-06,” (Moscow, 1985), [http://russmus.net/song/4744#2](http://russmus.net/song/4744#2).
81 Boris Grebenshikov, “Ivanov,” (Moscow, 1982), [http://russmus.net/song/4681#2](http://russmus.net/song/4681#2).
they were to Time Machine. Their power came in their on-stage antics and performance as seen in the Tbilisi-80.

However, the early 1980s did not see an immediate far-reaching acceptance of rock ‘n’ roll. The Soviet government still held traditional views on music and culture so rock ‘n’ roll was still the enemy. In fact, some of the bands that performed at the Tbilisi concert-- Time Machine for example-- were met with bans. The early 1980s were much more tumultuous than the 1970s, due in part the number of leadership changes. During the early 1980s two very conservative premiers headed the Soviet Union. The first was Yuri Andropov and the second was Konstantin Chernenko. Both of these men spent a considerable amount of time and effort combatting rock ‘n’ roll as a way to cater to the conservative Kremlin politicians. The view of the Soviet government was perfectly expressed by Sergi Tsvigun (the number two man at the KGB) in an interview with Kommunist. In response to a question about the goal of rock ‘n’ roll, he responded, “Nothing less than bourgeois mass culture which is aiming at the spiritual devastation of our youth and the assertion of an alien ideology.”

1985 marked a momentous change in the legality and social standing of rock ‘n’ roll. Up until this point, rock ‘n’ roll had a complicated relationship with the state. On one hand they

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promoted, distributed, and supported Western rockers as well as a few Soviet rockers. On the other hand, the State rejected the underground rock ‘n’ roll scene dominated by groups like Aquarium. Rock ‘n’ roll in the underground scene was the means by which artists expressed their criticisms of Soviet life. However, the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev remedied the relationship between the Soviet authorities and homegrown rock musicians, allowing for Russian rock ‘n’ roll to grow to international recognition and limited fame. Gorbachev did not directly accept any one underground band, nor could he. The position and situation that he received made it incredibly difficult to actively promote rock ‘n’ roll. However, through economic and social reform, Mikhail Gorbachev positively affected the status and function of Soviet rock ‘n’ roll.

Gorbachev inherited a very disgruntled political situation as the new Soviet leader. With two different leadership changes in the past two years, he looked to maintain his position and return the Soviet Union to the relative tranquility that was scene during Brezhnev’s leadership. The Soviet economy was in drastic need of revitalization if it was to compete with the United States and the rest of the West. The USSR was in desperate need of a transformation. The standard of living was nowhere near that of the West and the citizens were more aware of this issue than ever. Gorbachev also came under immense pressure from U.S. President Ronald Regan to better Soviet-American relations in efforts for world peace. In response to the rising social issues, Gorbachev established the joint policies of perestroika. The first policy was perestroika and it was aimed at rejuvenating the Soviet economy through restructuring. The second policy was glasnost, and it had a more direct effect on Soviet rock musicians. Glasnost was aimed at allowing citizens to be more knowledgeable about the social issues facing the

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Soviet Union and the ways that the government worked to resolve them.\(^8^7\) Although both policies received a considerable amount of backlash within society, they were fundamental in transforming rock ‘n’ roll from an illegal art form to one of popularity with global recognition.

Under Gorbachev rock ‘n’ roll became a form and basis of communication between the East and West as well as between the Soviet citizens and their leaders. The first evidence that Soviet rock ‘n’ roll transcended the Iron Curtain was the joint (Soviet-American) album named Red Wave.\(^8^8\) This album was created Joanna Stingray, a half American half Russian singer from Los Angeles. The track featured four groups, Kino, Alisa, Strange Games, and Aquarium, all of whom were considered unofficial by Melodiya and the Soviet authorities prior to the Gorbachev thaw. The album did enjoy a limited amount of success in the United States with fifteen thousand records sold in 1987.\(^8^9\) Interestingly, this international success resounded in the Soviet Union. According to the New York Times article, Boris Grebenshikov and Aquarium received official recognition from the Soviet state on account of their success in the States.\(^9^0\) Those same rock groups featured on Red Wave were also given official venues to perform in. According to reporter Louise Branson, “The authorities in Leningrad recently turned over a 6,500-seat sports stadium to one of the most talented groups, Aquarium, for eight nights…Kino, Alisa and Strange Games, are also being invited to perform at the officially sanctioned events.”\(^9^1\)

\(^8^7\) Ibid. 166.
\(^8^9\) Ibid. 43.
\(^9^0\) Ibid. 43.
punishing Soviet rock musicians for the popularity of their music and for communication with American recording artists, they were awarded with officialdom and a venue to perform. Rock ‘n’ roll reflected of the more open relationship that the Soviet Union was attempting to foster through the policies of glasnost and perestroika. Interestingly, most of the proceeds of the album went back to the bands, they were able to purchase the very expensive (three thousand dollars for a Yamaha guitar) concert gear required to do large live performances.92

Red Wave was not the sole Soviet/Russian rock album to garner international success and change rock ‘n’ roll in the Soviet sphere. Boris G released the album Radio Silence in 1988. The producer of the album was none other than Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics. The most popular song -- Radio Silence -- received relative popularity in the United States, making it to number one ninety-eight on the Billboard top 200 list.93 It may not sound like a lot of success; however, for a Russian musician who spent the majority of his career banned from preforming in his homeland, this was a huge success. The song’s success culminated in a United States tour in 1989, in which he performed on the David Letterman Show.94 His performance on the show was rushed and he appeared nervous, but nonetheless he gained exposure to the United States public. As he sang the fourth verse of the song (also named Radio Silence), it a seemed that his career had come to its fruition and with it Soviet rock ‘n’ roll. It read, “It’s strange I don’t feel like I’m

a stranger, I feel like I belong here, I feel like I’ve been waiting for a long time, And now I can tell you some stories.”95 The music allowed him to feel at home in place that is completely foreign. For someone who spent his whole life idolizing Western artists, to perform in front of thousands if no millions of people was the pinnacle of his career to that point. Russia had finally exported its own viable rock music. He recognized the power with in his ability to relay information of living in the Soviet Union. For Boris G, this was more than just a performance; rather it was the culmination of all the hard work, dedication, and pain that he put into his music. This was exactly what he had been working for, to be able to bring his thoughts, ideas, and music on to a popular, international stage; a stage where his voice could be heard and listened to. On account of his success, Melodiya made Aquarium (Boris G’s band) official and released a compilation of their records.96 The Soviet Union finally recognized the underground rock scene as a legitimate aspect of Russian culture.

As Boris Grebenshikov captivated American audiences, Russian rock fans embraced the new freedoms of Gorbachev’s reforms. In August of 1989 the Soviet looked the other way as the first ever international rock festival on Russian soil, the Moscow Music Peace Festival.97 The set list was broken up into two nights with Skid Row, Cinderella, and Bon Jovi headlined the first

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night, 98 and Motley Crue, Ozzy Osbourne, the Scorpions, and Gorky Park preformed on the second night. 99 All the bands except for Gorky Park (Moscow) hailed from Western countries. Peace and communication between the two blocs was the basis of the event; these ideas were reflected in the art surrounding the festival. The event poster featured a bald eagle (symbol of American) grasping the hammer and sickle (symbol of communism) in its talons. 100 The symbolism of this poster was incredibly powerful. It suggested a cooperative relationship between the liberal and democratic ideals of American freedom and the communist ideals of the Soviet Union. On the eagle’s back rests a “peace sign”. In the four open spaces between the bars of the sign are four flags; the communist flag (red with a hammer and sickle) and the American flag (stars and stripes) occupy the two largest sections at the top of the sign the top while the German flag (black, red, and yellow strips going from left to right) and the British flag (blue, red, and white stripes crossed at the middle) occupying the lower, smaller spaces. 101 The artwork was not the only aspect of the festival that fostered a better relationship between the East and West as well as reflecting the connective power of rock ‘n’ roll. The most important performance was Gorky Park. Named after the famous park in Moscow, this band was the sole Russian band to perform in the festival. This was the first time that Russian bands and Western bands shared a common stage. It was momentous step in the direction of collaboration and communication between the East and West, even if it was on the basis of music. In the words of sixteen-year-old

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
concert goer Olga Sizoua, “This is a happy day. It’s not just the music, but the things that are happening in our country. We see change.”102 The concert reflected the progression of Soviet society, from being completely isolated and cut off from foreign influence, to embracing and accepting foreign culture and ideals. This concert signaled a changing tide in Soviet politics and society.

Just two short months later, on the night of November ninth and the Berlin Wall came crashing down at the hands of the German people.103 All the pent-up aggression and anguish that had built up over the last century played out in that autumn night. The defining symbol of oppression and communist power crumbled under the weight of Western freedom and democracy. People could not believe that the wall actually came down. In the words of Klaus Mien (lead singer of Scorpions), “we saw people dancing on top of the wall launch of November in our, here in Berlin and it was, we couldn’t believe it, we couldn’t believe our eyes. It was like a vision coming true.”104 The falling of the Berlin Wall, as unexpected as it was, reflected the growing tensions in Europe and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s reforms (perestroika and glasnost) did little to fix the ailing economy and only caused more frustration with in Soviet society, while also emboldening the many ethnic minorities under Communist rule. With new freedoms under the reforms, many of the ethnic groups under Soviet rule including the

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103 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 435.

Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis demanded autonomy and were willing to use force to gain it.\textsuperscript{105} Mass unrest throughout the ethnic regions of the Soviet Union coupled with the destruction of the Berlin Wall, caused the Communist domination to falter abroad and at home. Starting with the Germans and spreading to Poles and the Czechs the air of Western freedom washed over the former Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{106} Finally, in June 1991, the Russian nation held its first presidential election and elected Gorbachev’s longtime rival Boris Yeltsin as president.\textsuperscript{107} The Soviet leaders and the Communist party of Russia were no longer the sole leaders of the Russian people. Gorbachev’s response was to draft an agreement called the Treaty Union; in which the Russian government and the Soviet Union would share governing power.\textsuperscript{108} This agreement did not sit well with the Communist hardliners that inhabited the dying Soviet government. So on August 18, five of Gorbachev’s former cabinet members (Oleg Banklanov, deputy chairman of the Defense Council; Gennady Yanaev, vice president; Valentin Pavlov, the premier; Vladimir Kriuchkov, chairman of the KGB; Dmitry Yazov, minister of defense; Boris Pugo, the minister of internal affairs) created the Emergency Committee and arrested Gorbachev thus assuming control of the Soviet government. Their explanation for these dramatic shifts in leadership was that Gorbachev had become too sick to lead.\textsuperscript{109} What happen next defied any logic or historical precedent of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet authorities called on the KGB and the Russian army to storm the headquarters of the Russian republic and eliminate its members, they (the


\textsuperscript{106} Leffler, \textit{For the Soul of Mankind}, 435.

\textsuperscript{107} Hough, \textit{Democratization and Revolution in the USSR} 308.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 424

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. 429.
KGB and army) did not comply. The coup ended with the arrest of the five cabinet members by the Russian republic and Gorbachev being returned to his position; however, it held little to no power.

Rock ‘n’ roll in the Soviet Union has maintained complicated and inconsistent relationship with the Communist authorities. Starting in the 1950s, rock ‘n’ roll was stigmatized due to its Western origins. However, its popularity in the Communist blocs surged. Over the next decades rock ‘n’ roll developed a dual relationship with the State. The 60s saw The Beatles penetrate the Iron Curtain and the creation of the first rock-style Soviet bands. The 1970s rolled around and Soviets adapted the sounds of rock to their own Russian language. Bands like Time Machine and Aquarium rose to prominence during this decade due to their ingenious lyrics and risqué stage antics. Despite their popularity, both groups received little favor from the State. As the 80s turned, the Tbilisi-80 rock festival perpetuated rock’s anti-communist stigma and negative status in Soviet society. Boris G and Aquarium exposed Soviet fans to the first real display of rock ‘n’ roll freedom, yet they were rejected and subject to a ban. Their performance embodied the rebellious nature that rock ‘n’ roll attained through decades of tensions with the State.

The year 1985 marked a fundamental change in the Soviet Union as well as rock ‘n’ roll. Mikhail Gorbachev, poised to revitalize the Soviet Union as its new leader, introduced the policies of perestroika and glasnost. The idea that was through more open communication about politics and the doings of the government (glasnost) and restructuring of the economy (perestroika), the stagnation of Soviet society would end. Immediately, Soviet rock bands experienced more freedom and rock ‘n’ roll became a mode of connection rather than dissent. In

110 Ibid. 431.
1986, the first joint Soviet-American record was produced. In selling fifteen thousand records in the United States, Soviet rock ‘n’ roll transcended the political boundaries and became a basis for connection. Aquarium, a band who symbolized the counterculture nature of rock ‘n’ roll became a symbol of the changing relationship between the Soviet Union, its people, and the West. Boris (lead singer of Aquarium) did not stop there. In 1989, he became the first Soviet rock musician to perform on American television as well as go on an American tour. Soviet rock ‘n’ roll finally exported a viable musician, bringing Soviet opinions and culture on to an international level. In the same year, the Soviet Union hosted its first international rock concert, the Moscow Music Peace Festival. Featured were a variety of popular Western bands as well as Gorky Park, a metal band hailing from Moscow. Gorky Park’s inclusion in the event showed tribute to the viable and unique Soviet scene that was finally gained recognition and legitimacy under Gorbachev. The world was aware of the Soviet rock scene and its contributions to Soviet society. Rock ‘n’ roll’s journey from the margins of Soviet society to the international stage reflects well on the course of Soviet history. As the Soviet Union moved towards liberalization and communication in the global arena, rock ‘n’ roll embodied the evolution of Soviet society from isolation to openness.

In the early 1990s the story of Soviet rock ‘n’ roll ended and Russian rock rose in its place. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Soviet influence over Russian culture dissipated. Russian society experienced freedom and liberty; however, rock ‘n’ roll maintained its rebellious and progressive nature. Russian rockers found new causes and new criticism for their changing society. Since then groups like Pussyriot, an all-female punk rock band continue to demonstrate the true function of rock ‘n’ roll; a mode of political and social expression. Rallying on supposed anti-Russian ideals like feminism and gender-equality. The group has managed to make quite an impression in the recent decades. In 2017, the group
stormed the Trump Tower (New York) in protest of the incarceration of political prisoners at the hands of Putin and Trump.\textsuperscript{111} Despite the fall of communism and the dissolution of the USSR, Russian rock continues to stay true to its roots. Musicians continue the fight for political freedom and the embodiment of progressive ideals.

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