

# Russia Outward

memoir by [John Rust](#)

**My story is pretty long and strange** - growing up in the Ukraine, on the other side of the Iron Curtain which was slowly vanishing then, my opportunities to hear music were rather limited. First records were those two by the early Beatles released by the only legal record label of the USSR - Firma Melodiya: *A Hard Day's Night* and *Taste Of Honey* - back in 1988. Perestroika was coming and soon there appeared the great "Archive Of Popular Music" LPs - the first one was a bad compilation of the Doors, 2nd - early Stevie Wonder stuff, 3rd - Creedence Clearwater Revival, 4th and 5th - The Rolling Stones 1964-65... all of them influenced me a lot. Some strange tapes came - and some music articles started to appear in the local press. My friends and I discovered the mysterious PUNK-movement...there were weird pics of hardcore punks with incredible haircuts and No Future-slogans...enough to impress us all heavily. I formed a band with my school-mates willing to play punk rock (the journalists used to emphasize the fact that all the punk bands were amateurs which suited us perfectly). But there were no punk records around - Melodiya was publishing neither Pistols nor Clash. I remember the excitement of first listening to *Closer* by Joy Division - the guy who gave the tape to me said it was punk.... We learned this lesson and started playing, using three acoustic guitars and home-made drums and recorded a couple of terrible albums inspired mostly by Joy Division and the awful tape of *Never Mind The Bollocks*, which was soon found in Moscow.

Then I took part in a students' exchange program (1990) and lived two weeks with an Italian family in Bologna meeting some wonderful people. One of them, the English teacher Vincenzo, took me to his apartment once and gave me 5 cassettes which I was to fill using his unbelievable collection. I came back to the Ukraine with some fantastic tapes: Velvet Underground & Nico, Dead Kennedys, *Substance* by Joy Division and some angry punk stuff like Mentors and Crucifix. The Velvet Underground became my absolute favorites. I formed another band, playing different music. The whole local scene - meaning all the non-commercial bands were under heavy influence of Sergey Myasoev. This guy owned all the right music of the time and was an expert: you could find the most obscure things at his place - all the 4AD bands of the time, Nick Cave, Neubauten, Throbbing Gristle, Psychic TV, Coil, Swans etc. He shared his addiction to the indie-scene and gave inspiration to some very spectacular acts which disbanded in some years and are extremely underrated today. These include Kzma Kzma which played the modern guide to medieval music, ELZA (Ukrainian Talking Heads/Velvet Underground thing... they were the first local band that toured abroad - with an American duo Sabot that based in Czechoslovakia then), Foa-Hoka (very dark... first experiments with electronics in the industrial direction...they released an album in Poland) and some others. They all formed Novaya Scena-union and Sergey became the Maclaren of it (the whole scene was documented by the CD *Underground in Ukraine* on What's So Funny About? that introduced Europeans to the scene).

The first independent radio appeared around 1992, playing mostly indie-music and classic rock - the DJs were mostly the musicians. I took an active part in organising the third FM station in my city, becoming one of the first DJ's there. X-Radio was the weirdest radio in the area, playing a wide range from ABBA and Queen to the Sex Pistols, Pixies and Nirvana. Grunge was "in" then, being treated as a kind of our revenge to punk. More amazing

discoveries of the time in no particular order - Smiths, early Cure, Crime And The City Solution, reggae, David Byrne's *Rei Momo* (one of my fave records still), Sonic Youth, Faith No More, Iggy Pop (Stooges), Birthday Party, Zappa (*Joe's Garage*), Can....

The small remains/survivors of Novaya Scena were very disappointed and fed up with everything connected to rock'n'roll and were searching for a new alternative. I was close to some of them and also got into Satie, Philip Glass, Michael Nyman, etc. Someone brought a tape of the first Mr. Bungle album which was a very important experience; soon some late Naked City appeared - I guess it was *Grand Guignol*. It was unbelievable - completely different from all the stuff we've been listening to. The information that the main guy of Naked City [John Zorn] produced the Bungle record was great news. Smith by Ribot and Frith appeared at the same time and was deeply appreciated.

I left the Ukraine 4 years ago and live in Germany now. The commercial aspect of the modern music brought some big disappointments about the ways of show business. Zorn and the related artists became very important to me - as much as the way of solving the problem and reaching the audiences without selling out.

After two years I joined the band Unterwasser, formed by the guy who was in the Moscow band Srednerusskaya Vozvishennost', which I used to listen to when I was 15-16; released a CD with them and recorded a new one some months ago. ([www.freespeech.org/unterwasser](http://www.freespeech.org/unterwasser)) Recently have been listening to - Boredoms - *Wow 2*, Ruins - *Burning Stone*, Mingus - *Reincarnation of a Love Bird*, Kletka Red - *Hybrid*, Tortoise - *TNT*, Bar Kokhba, first Massacre, Laswell's *Charged* live boot, Bungle - *California*, The Angels Of Light - *New Mother*, La Monte Young, Martin Denny, Moondog - *Sax Pax for a Sax*.

.... well, that's the story so far. Thanks for reading this - I had to share it with somebody.