

Ekaterina Ganskaya

Anti-war and Protest Songs in the times of Military Censorship in Russia After the 24th Of February

Soviet cultural policy is well-known for its crusade against protest music in the '70-the '80s. Rock— being the mouthpiece of protest sentiments—was officially “banned,” so the musicians were forced to form the underground scene, risking losing the possibility to perform or even being imprisoned for their “anti-Soviet” and protest activity. At the same time, the scene was filled with loyal artists performing solely governmentally approved material.

The situation of the '80 unsurprisingly repeated itself after the beginning of the so-called special military operation when rock musicians—such as Boris Grebenshikov (Aquarium), Andrei Makarevich (Time Machine), and Yuri Shevchuk (DDT), etc.—spoke out against the invasion of Ukraine. With the help of the media machine, they were immediately claimed as enemies again. The same can be said about the younger generation of musicians (e.g., Oxxxymiron, Noize MC, Manizha, etc.) who overnight turned from national pride into traitors to the motherland solely for their anti-war, protest music material. Given that, most of the current “unwanted” artists—before the start of the invasion—were massive stars in terms of commercial success and symbolic value: from Shevchuk, whose lyrics were included in the school program, to Manizha, who represented Russia in the Eurovision Song Contest in 2021.

The “cancel culture” that Vladimir Putin blames Europe for has first taken a toll on local popular music, mainly using the upgraded tools well-known from the Soviet times: hate speech against disloyal artists in the media, lists of “unwanted artists” and “foreign agents,” ban on concert activity, etc. In my paper, I wish to shed light on the music censorship mechanisms in contemporary Russia and trace the escape routes the musicians choose to maintain their right to speak out in the times of military censorship.

Bio: Ekaterina Ganskaya (ekaterina.ganskaya@unito.it) is a second-year doctoral student at the University of Turin (Italy), developing a research project on diverse critical discourses surrounding peripheral—Soviet and Italian—music markets.

Her research interest lies in the fields of historical and contemporary consumer culture and music market, the history of music journalism, the history of propaganda, ideological and meanings' shaping processes in the field of popular music. Ekaterina's publications discuss a variety of topics, ranging from the history of Soviet mass songs during the Stalinist era to the notion of “rock poetry” in Soviet journalistic and academic texts; from the history of the official and underground Soviet music press to the music censorship in contemporary Russia.