



Andy Manhart/Daily Nebraskan

## Heart of rock 'n' roll beats in Russia; Western music left true spirit behind

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**G**lasnost may or may not be for real, but in the land of homemade vodka and cold beet soup, "the times they are a-changin'."

Ever since the first documentaries showing the new phenomenon of Elvis Presley as an example of the "decadent West," young Russians have been listening to American and British rock 'n' roll. Most of them didn't understand the words, but just like their American and British teen-age counterparts, who also couldn't understand the words, they could still tell what the music was saying. Despite official resistance and insistence to the contrary, Russia is not the same.

Underground music in Russia is thriving, as well as the officially recognized version. The Soviet Union has an interesting system: An artist or band can apply for official recognition from the state and have all of its lyrics, liner notes, cover art, etc., screened for "appropriateness of content" by a panel of state department bureaucrats, or it can ignore the censors and not officially (i.e. legally) be allowed to receive any compensation for its creations. Here in the land of the free, where we're all protected by the First Amendment, that unpleasant function is taken care of by radio formats and record companies.

Although at the moment the glut of Russian rock music—especially the official brand—seems five to 10 years behind the West and pollutes itself with too much of the kind of self-indulgence of late '70s art-rock and the mindless thud of early '80s British haircut-synthpop, the core of what's there is good—very good.

With that in mind, one can't help

but think of the enormous potential Russian music has. First of all, because communism, not as practically applied but in its idealistic sense, is much closer to rock's communal ideals of spiritualism, compassion and involvement for everyone than the elitist competition of capitalism.

Also, when you consider that most of the truly notable inspiration in rock 'n' roll came from visionaries who not only felt, but aggressively subverted the oppression and disdain they felt while living in a superficially free society, then a coldbed of institutional oppression like Russia should be literally exploding with poetic rage.

In the West, artistic conformists get rich and are admired and revered while outspoken visionaries are ignored or ridiculed and occasionally critically acclaimed. Behind the curtain, conformists get official approval and very little of the proceeds, while outspoken visionaries get ridiculed, ignored, occasionally critically acclaimed and occasionally jailed.

Outspoken visionaries have always been willing to risk being jailed to express their beliefs (Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X), so they aren't likely to be stifled much.

However, if there's no market for pretend rebellion, the kind that gluts up the airwaves and MTV, there may be more incentive, more attention paid and more effort given to actually putting honest thought and feeling into art, something of rare quality in the West these days. Whether it be music, literature or something to be invented, eventually this rare quality could filter its way back over here to inspire the next generation of Americans.

Just the thought of a nation of 250 million people with a thriving music industry not constipated with

Night Ranger, Survivor, Motley Crue and Loverboy clones is enough to cause orgasmic chills.

Another interesting facet is the Communist Party's attitude toward religion. In America, we all know that saying there is no God or that God is dead is considered shocking, repulsive, subversive. In Russia, that's the official party line.

Yet another irony: The Old Guard members of the Russian leadership warn their countrymen that rock 'n' roll is a decadent Western propaganda tool designed to subvert the morals of their youth.

In the '50s, U.S. parents were warned that rock 'n' roll was a commie plot designed to subvert the morals of our youth. Amazingly enough, two diametrically opposed political systems with completely opposite approaches to government managed to place the same kind of idiots in power.

As for the more subversive element of rock 'n' roll, in the United States, we have the repressive, flag-waving sector telling us all to toe the line for Uncle Sam and aligning themselves arm-in-arm with the Fundamentalist Right. Subversive pinko Godless-commie sympathizers are radical leftists. So, in Russia, which side are they on? What's subversive in a communist country where God doesn't officially exist?

On the surface, it seems that Russia may have the best chance to fulfill the potential that rock 'n' roll has been promising for the last 35 years. I hope they have the necessary arrogance to ignore the trail paved by us, the decadent West, and can actually create their own towering music industry, uncluttered by Top-40, AOR, formats, demographics, A&R executives and MTV's Hollywood farm system. We can only hope.

But then, Russia will probably blow it—after all, we did.

## Group provokes question: Are they he's or she's?

Voice of the Beehive, "Just a City," Food, Ltd.

How to describe this album? Well, maybe I should say that I was very frustrated to discover it was nothing more than a 12-inch 45. It makes you think about all the wasted vinyl that could have been saved had the Voice of the Beehive confined their artistic expressions to a simple 7-incher. Somewhere there's a little kid without a raincoat, and we all know who's to blame, don't we?

The photo of Voice of the Beehive on the cover is a definite attention-getter. When I saw this, I thought, "Oh, no, what is this? Boy George revisited? Haven't we had enough of British transvestites invading our inner ears (although I can't help but like the hair on the guy from Dead or Alive)?" Anyway, here comes the really fun part of the album: It's not the songs themselves, but the fun of trying to guess whether or not the

lament ("It's just a city/And I'm just a girl," sing the duo, which makes you start wondering about their smiles again). The choruses of their songs are catchy, too. "I Walk the Earth" starts side two sounding just a little bit like "A Hazy Shade of Winter" before detouring into a folksy interlude, and you start wondering whether the blond beehive is really Mary from Peter and Paul, or one of the A's from ABBA.

"Seven Shocks," the final song, is the best one of the bunch. It's a good dance song (the other two are, as well, not that you'll have any time for dancing while you're looking at the cover and trying to decide just what they are) and takes a page from the Violent Femmes by trying to detail just why they want to give you seven shocks:

"One because you have no money/  
Two because he didn't show/Three because you don't feel ready/And four because you never know."

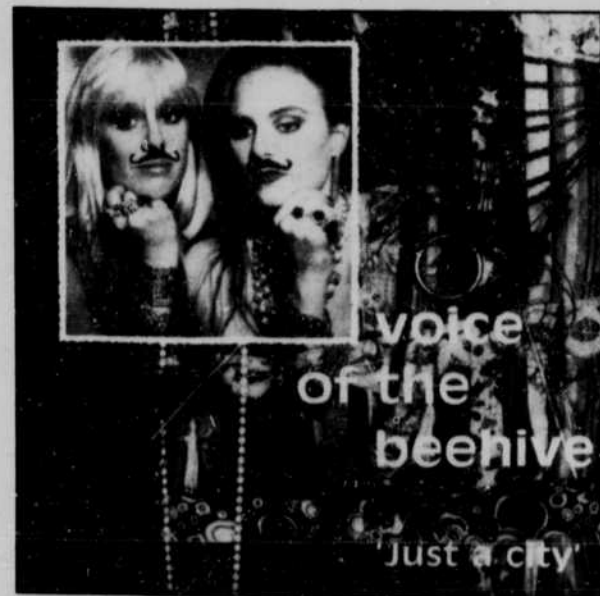


beauties on the cover are he's or she's. They sound like females on the record, a combination of Debbie Harry and the Bangles. Who knows? On the back cover, there's a group photo, and you still can't tell. One of them really looks like a female, and they both have nasty little smiles on their faces. This makes me wonder whether they're smiling because they're really men and know they've got you fooled or because they're women and look like men. Whatever the case, you can't help but like a record whose label is "Food, Ltd."

The songs themselves (all three of them) are not bad. "Just a City," the title track and only song on side one, is really nothing more than a pop

That's the record in a nutshell: just like the Femmes, only instead of forgetting what eight is for, Voice of the Beehive ignores the fact that we don't get to find out the reasons for shocks five through seven. However, once again, I'm stuck on their gender-blending. Does "Seven Shocks" mean the uncertain sex of the lead singers, and does the chorus mean I'll never know what they are, since the group members' names aren't on the jacket? Apart from all that, I recommend "Just a City," if only for a topic for conversation with your friends at Burger King. Are they or aren't they? It's worth \$5 just to wonder.

— William Rudolph



Album courtesy of Food, Ltd.

Beehive: Boys or girls?