

FUNNIES



Union of politics, music can open eyes to ideas

By Brian Peterson

Ivan Jirous has spent nearly nine years in Czechoslovakian prisons for various political activities condemned by the government. He and his band Plastic People of the Universe were arrested in 1976 for "creating public disturbances" and "singing indecent songs."

Their arrest led in part to the internationally known human rights document Charter 77. Jirous has been arrested again, this time charged with "harming the interests of the republic abroad" (Spin, August 1989).

Jirous has a long history of activism and long has used music to convey his ideas to others. But he is not alone. Thousands of musicians around the world have similar histories of persecution.

Why do these musicians take such risks by performing music which they must know will be considered subversive and likely lead to legal difficulties?

The circumstances are not always so extreme, but anyone paying attention to music journalism can observe that musicians of all styles and persuasions are uniting the domains of music and politics.

Many listeners complain that political concerns are intrusions upon music. Others appreciate or even expect such efforts.

Musicians who dabble in social concerns have two endeavors: to produce the music they enjoy, and to use that music to convey whatever messages they wish. Ideally, the two contribute to each other rather than one overpowering the other.

The recent commercial success of countless performers with political messages shows that a union of the two can be both possible and successful. Tracy Chapman and 10,000 Maniacs are recent examples of a continuing tradition of such fusion.

Mega-events such as Farm Aid and Amnesty International's Human Rights Now! tour provide further evidence of the possibility of success in this area.

Yet the question remains: Why do musicians get involved in social issues in the first place? Clearly, they want to get a message to the audience, to communicate ideas in the best way they can.

There are as many methods for communicating these messages as there are performers. Lyrics are the most obvious example, and spreading their message is facilitated by adding lyric sheets to releases.

There are numerous other means for the musical expression of political sentiments. Album covers probably do more to sell records than advertising and reputation. A striking image on a cover stays with a listener whether or not the album is purchased.

The Short Sharp Shocked LP of Michelle Shocked is an example of such, showing her getting arrested at a Stop The City demonstration in San Francisco. For what it is worth, the same photo idea was used on a Chaos U.K. album called Short Sharp Shock.

The release of an album, independent of its lyrical content, also can have political repercussions. With the advent of glasnost, Western rock music is entering the Soviet Union and further eroding East-West barriers.

The official USSR label, Melodiya, has pressed more than four million copies of the double album Rainbow Warriors, a money- and consciousness-raising effort for Greenpeace (Rolling Stone, April 20, 1989). The album features the likes of Sting, Eurythmics, Grateful Dead, Sade, Huey Lewis and U2, among others just as varied.

Greenpeace also benefits from concert announcements and proceeds from the single "Little Fighter" by White Lion (Spin, Oct. 89), the top-40 metal band that everyone likes to slam.

The band's glossy photos may adorn the lockers of junior high school students across the nation, but it takes something to open for AC/DC with "When the Children Cry," a tender anti-war number.

Musicians also can benefit causes by their mere appearance, such as providing public service announcements for various organizations.

Some more closely get involved with the causes they promote. Sting recently spent ten days with Kayapo Indians in the Brazilian rain forest in an international protest to protect the

See FIFTH on 7

Campus Notes

by Brian Shellito



Campus Notes

by Brian Shellito



the fifth column album review