

MEDIA, RELIGION and POPULAR CULTURE: **from extraordinary to extra-ordinary**

Seeking for God: Russian Rock Music and Religion¹

Nikolay POLIAKOV,
 Saint Petersburg State University, Russia

Abstract

The paper treats the correspondence of Russian rock music and the peculiarities of religiosity in the late Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. Russian rock music history is divided into several periods: the earliest period when rock music just came to the Soviet Union and mostly copied Western prototypes; the music of the perestroika period where religious motives were among the central and reflected spiritual and religious search typical for the country of that time; and Post-Soviet rock music which showed more and more interest in Orthodoxy often mixing it with identity search and nationalism. These trends had tight connection with general religious situation in the country. First of all, Russian rock music has never been anti-religious or anti-clerical, as in the country with official atheism both religion and rock music were underground and non-conformist. At the end of the 80-s many Russian musicians were seeking for the truth and spirituality in Oriental religious traditions and this interest to the East was among other factors provoked by Western culture and Rock music. In the 90-s Russia faced religious supermarket, and religious bricolage can be easily distinguished in the rock music of that period. Since the Soviet Union collapse Russian rock musicians were becoming more and more inspired by Orthodoxy which was often tightly connected with their search for individual and national identity. It is also essential that Russian rock music was not just influenced by religious, political or social situation in the country, it had a big impact on it as well. For example, during perestroika rock music played an important role in social and political situation, for it

formulated a very clear and urgent request for change. At the same time many popular rock music bands promoted religion, primarily Orthodoxy, among their fans and thus influenced religiosity in Russia.

Keywords

Music and religion, Russian rock music, spiritual supermarket, Orthodoxy and identity search.

Resumen

Este escrito trata de la correspondencia entre la música rock rusa y las peculiaridades de la religiosidad en la Rusia Soviética y Postsoviética. La historia de la música rock rusa se divide en varios periodos: el periodo inicial, cuando la música rock acababa de llegar a la Unión Soviética y solía imitar los prototipos occidentales; la música del periodo de la perestroika, cuando los motivos religiosos eran una cuestión central y reflejaban la búsqueda espiritual y religiosa, muy típica del país de entonces; y la música rock postsoviética que se mostraba cada vez más interesada en la ortodoxia, amalgamándolo, en muchas ocasiones, con la búsqueda de la identidad y con el nacionalismo. Esas tendencias estaban bastante emparentadas con la situación religiosa del país en general. En primer lugar, la música rock rusa nunca era antireligiosa ni anticlerical, ya que la religión y la música rock eran igualmente clandestinas y inconformistas en el país oficialmente ateo. A finales de los '80, muchos músicos rusos trataban de encontrar la verdad y la espiritualidad en las tradiciones religiosas orientales, y entre los factores que habían provocado el interés por el Este estaban la cultura y la música rock occidentales.

En los '90 Rusia se encontró con el supermercado religioso, de modo que en la música de aquel período se percibe fácilmente cierto bricolaje religioso. Desde la caída de la Unión Soviética, los músicos rock rusos se inspiraban cada vez más por la ortodoxia, lo cual tenía mucho que ver con su búsqueda de la identidad individual y nacional. Además, es esencial que la música rock rusa no solamente fue influida por la situación religiosa, política y social del país, sino que también produjo un efecto importante sobre ella. Durante la perestroika, por ejemplo, la música rock desempeñaba un papel significativo en la situación social y política, puesto que enunciaba una demanda de cambios clara y urgente. Al mismo tiempo, muchas bandas populares de rock promovían la religión, y especialmente la ortodoxa, entre sus seguidores, contribuyendo así a la religiosidad en Rusia.

Palabras clave

Música y religión, música rock rusa, supermercado espiritual, ortodoxia y la búsqueda de la identidad.

Introduction

The issue of connection between rock music and religiosity is relatively new for Russian cultural studies, but in the West, where the spiritual sphere has been free from the state dictates for a long time this topic has been widely discussed. One of the subjects for discussion is diametrically opposed views on rock culture expressed by various Christian denominations. On the one hand, some conservative Christians have been criticizing rock music for the prevalence of anti-clerical, mystical and occult ideas for several decades (Larson, 1967). As Jay Howard claims, "Religion and rock music have long had a love/hate relationship. Rock music is often charged with being a perverter of America's youth and an underminer of Christian moral values." (Howard, 1992). On the other hand, there has been an attempt to use rock to attract young people to religion by a number of Christian denominations and rock music (of course primarily so called Christian rock has been even considered as a source of religious experience and revelation (Seay & Neely, 1986; Romanowski, 2005; Häger, 2011). As David Chidester claims on this point, "Rock 'n' roll has occasionally converged with religion. Rock music has sometimes embraced explicitly religious themes, serving as a vehicle for a diversity of

religious interests that ranges from heavy metal Satanism to contemporary Christian evangelism." (Chidester, 2003, p. 512). Both these trends can be clearly seen in Russia as well.

The aim of this paper is to show the inter-connection of the religious situation in Russia and religious seeking of the most prominent Russian rock musicians of the last three decades. So called "God-seeking" has a long history in Russia being one of the central themes of the Russian religious philosophy of the beginning of the XX century. At the same time it has been one of the major topics for Russian rock musicians and thus impacted their fans, who often got interested in religion and formed their religious beliefs having listened to the songs of their favorite bands. The lyrics of different Russian rock bands will be analyzed in the paper and it will be shown that during the last 30 years different trends can be traced in Russian rock music, which are, on the one hand, connected with rock stars personal experience and beliefs and their own religious transformation, but on the other hand, with general cultural, religious and political tendencies in Russia.

So far there has been written several books devoted to Russian rock music in English such as Ryback (1990), Ramet (1994) and Steinholt (2005), and a number of articles, for instance, Ramet and Zamashchikov (1990), Wickström and Steinholt (2009). In Russian there has been published a number of works, dedicated to the history of rock music in the Soviet Union and Russia, most influential of which include Alekseev and Burlaka (1991), Burlaka, (2007), Alekseev (2009), Kushnir (1994 and 2003). Almost nothing has been said so far about Russian rock music and religion correspondence; a rare example is a paper by Nikol'skaya (2000). Yet, the issue of Russian rock music and religion seems rather important and topical not only for broader knowledge of Russian rock music itself, but also for understanding political, social and religious processes in Russia.

The Emergence of Russki Rok (Russian Rock music)

The Soviet culture, despite the existence of the so-called "Iron Curtain", was not completely detached from the main paradigms of Western cultural development. First acquaintance with popular rock'n'roll music in the USSR occurred in 1957

during *the World Festival of Youth and Students*, but for a long time it remained almost inaccessible and definitely underground. One of the important differences of nascent *russskii rok* (Russian rock music) from its Western prototype was that unlike rock music in the UK or the USA, it did not position itself as anything anti-religious or anti-clerical. If John Lennon could say, “Rock music has got the same message as before. It is anti-religious, anti-nationalistic and anti-morality,” (Blanchard, 1992, p. 84) the situation in the Soviet Union was opposite. It was well-articulated by one of *Akvarium’s* musicians Mikhail Feinshtein-Vasil’ev, “This is something I realised a very long time ago: Western rock as such, most significantly American rock, is founded on an opposition to the official church. And that might count for God as well. But Russian rock [and] roll holds the diametrically opposite position where this question is concerned, because it emerged during the time of Soviet power.” (Yngvar, 2005, p. 24).

In the country, which was officially dominated by an atheistic ideology, its alternative was religion rather than any form of anti-clericalism (as it was in the West). Religion, just like rock’n’roll was underground and perceived as revolutionary, especially from 1958 to 1964, which are known as the years of Khrushchev’s anti-clerical reform. A respectful attitude to religious values is already evident in the works of some of *the Sixtiers* (“shestideciatniki”) – a generation of the Soviet Intelligentsia, who entered the culture and politics in the late 1950s and 1960s after the Khrushchev Thaw. Among other new cultural phenomena it gave birth to so called *Orthodox revival* and its prominent figures, such as priests Alexander Men or Gleb Yakunin were among *the Sixtiers*.

Unlike official literature, rock poetry developed separately from the prevailing ideology and turned to Christian subjects and symbols more freely. However, their use of religious topics was more aesthetic than religious, because in the 60-s and 70-s most Soviet beat and rock bands were engaged in covering and copying of the best western rock scene samples, and as religious themes were not at the top of western rock music agenda, they were not central in the works of the Soviet musicians either. Religious questions, for example, the theme of God and Satan antagonism, was much more familiar to Soviet people from

Dostoevsky’s novels than from the Bible, but in the Russian rock music lyrics of the 60-s they were altered or replaced with plots of an endless struggle between Good and Evil, love and hatred, Heavens and earth.

In the 70-s groups for which religious themes were central began to appear. For instance, a famous Soviet composer Vladimir Martynov, who started as an avant-gardist, founded a rock band “Forpost” in the late 1970-s. His works of the period demonstrated both his interest to Christianity and to the East, and he attempted to synthesize the two cultures. His lyrics and music were in the common trend of New Age spirituality with typical for it religious syncretism. His own work he compared with the path of *Tao*; and his adoption of the Taoist principle of *u-wei* (non-action) logically led the composer to minimalism in his music. Martynov believed that in times of early Christianity, music played not an aesthetic role, but served as a tool for a harmonious balance with the Cosmos. Being eager to restore its former meaning and virtually obsessed with the search for new rituality (and not being able to find it in the church music), he went from academic music to rock, considering it to be the greatest music of contemporary. Martynov’s conceptualism was reflected in his concerts. During one of them he started to scatter leaflets that contained just one phrase – “Christ is my love!” which led to a conflict with the audience: people, living in the country of militant atheism, were frightened of an open referring to Christianity.

Russian Christian Rock Music

The first Christian rock band appeared in the USSR in 1980. Its musicians – Valery Barinov and Sergei Timokhin were parishioners of the Baptist church in Leningrad and chose a meaningful name for their band: *Trubnyi Zov* (“The Trumpet Call”). This title, borrowed from the biblical prophecies, reflected the main mission of the upcoming project and, according to the author of the songs, V. Barinov, was inspired by God: “The Lord prompted me the name of the band and directed me to give the world several trumpet calls.” His music format was determined in the same way: “The Lord clearly directed me: «Act in rock music! This is the most effective method of influencing young people.»” (Afanas’ev, 2013). In 1982 the band’s first album *Vtoroe prishestvie*

(“The Second Coming”) was recorded, but the oppression of the band members that had been initiated by the authorities led to band’s split, and it did not have much time to receive any recognition in Russia.

The first band to position itself as an Orthodox was *Galakticheskaya Federatsia* (“Galactic Federation”) formed in 1987 by Anatoly Vishnyakov. Despite its name, the band sang mostly about Russia – its idealized past (until 1917) and troubled present, interlacing the lyrics with quotes from Orthodox prayers. In 1988 A. Vishnyakov founded what he himself characterized as “a new musical direction «Rock Orthodox»” (“Orthodox rock”), celebrating it with a concert that programme was dedicated to Christianization of Rus’ thousandth anniversary. However, their first album was released only in 1990 and had a name that spoke for itself *Sviataya Rossia* (“Holy Russia”). Three years later, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, Ioann (John) blessed A. Vishnyakov for the creation of an Orthodox music center *Galakticheskaya Federatsia* (“Galactic Federation”) where the bands of similar views and faith *Kovcheg* (“The Ark”), *Novii Zavet* (“New Testament”) and etc. cooperated and performed.

1994 is seen as the year when rock musicians’ active proselytism started in Russia: an album of Christian rock, performed by Russian bands and entitled “Christian Rock Anthology in Russia,” was released. The author of the project was Igor Korol, head of the Christian musical producing center *Messiya* (“Messiah”). The collection included compositions by several popular bands of the time united above all by their religious beliefs, not music styles: for example, Olga Arefieva and «Kovcheg» (*The Ark*) played (and still play) folk-rock, “Legion” – heavy metal. Most album songs’ subject is glorification of God, life emptiness and meaninglessness without Him, appeals to turn to Christ despite hard life and everyday circumstances. Well-known bands’ participation in the project contributed to its success in terms of the distribution. However, straightforwardness of the album lyrics, which might have been partly caused by a practical goal – to convey musicians’ religious views to their listeners in an accessible musical form, did not added much popularity to Christian rock in Russia, and this genre has not become a full-fledged movement.

Russkii Rok (Russian Rock Music) of Perestroika, Request for Change and Religious Search

If religious beliefs could serve as a unity basis for some rock musicians, the vast majority of Russian rock band were unified simply due to geography. It must be noted that self-organization of the Russian rock movement began only in the late 1970-s and not without authorities “help,” who wanted to order and control this spontaneous movement which was gaining popularity. The musicians themselves strived to cooperate and unite for the sake of mutual assistance, necessary in the difficult conditions of half-underground existence in the Soviet Union, where rock music was never approved of. Three main Russian rock centers can be distinguished at that time: 1). Leningrad (St. Petersburg): where such bands as *Akvarium*, *Kino*, *Alisa*, *Zoopark* and *DDT* (who came from Ufa), *Televizor* were most active and were united in the so called *Rok Klub* (Rock Club); 2). Moscow: where *Zvuki Mu* and *Mashina Vremeni* (Time Machine) were most prominent; 3). and Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg) with *Nautilus Pompilius* (who later moved to Leningrad as well), *Chaif* and later *Agatha Christie*. These three centers differed significantly both in their style and organization.

As well as in other Eastern Bloc countries, rock music in the USSR was a kind of request for change catalyst. We can agree with Sabrina Ramet who writes, “The East European revolution of 1989 likewise others had its music, and that music was rock Vaclav Havel, former president of Czechoslovakia, even maintains that the revolution began in the rock scene”. (Ramet, 1994, p. 1). Most obvious call for alteration was given by Viktor Tsoi, *Kino* leader-vocalist in the rock anthem of the epoch – *Peremen!* (“Change!”): “Our hearts require change, our eyes require change. In our laughter and in ours tears, and in veins pulsation, Change! We are waiting for change!” Interpreting the role of rock idols Ramet adds, “Thus rock musicians figured in the Soviet and East European context of the 1980-s a bit like prophets. That is to say, they did not invent or create the ideas of revolution or the feelings of discontent and disaffection. But they were sensitive to the appearance and growth of these ideas and feelings and gave them articulation, and in this way they helped to reinforce the revolutionary”. (Ramet, 1994, p. 2).

Yet, such position seems rather simplified. Rock musicians were not just the voices of political change, more importantly they expressed a request for complete change of lifestyle and worldview. Whole generation of young people, listening to Russian rock music, first encountered with something completely different from the usual soviet ideology. *Russkii rok* led them to the search for new identity and their protest concerned all possible spheres of life: from fashion, hairstyle and coffee drinking to philosophy, oriental spirituality and religion. Russian musicians gave their listeners not only the idea of freedom and non-conformism, but also new worldview, new language, new everyday culture, some idea of authenticity, so distant from official falsehood. During Perestroika (1985-1991), when social issues were most acute, the unity of musicians and listeners reached its apogee, and Russian rock was experiencing a period of its heyday.

The changes taking place in the country in the second half of the 80-s also affected religious sphere. Official attitude to religion was altering significantly and its clear sign was 1988 Christianization of Rus' thousandth anniversary celebrating which was suddenly held with large-scale. The end of the 80-s and the beginning of the 90-s were the years of religious freedom and at the same time the period of broad religious and spiritual search. Religious syncretism and bricolage could be noticed everywhere: from book shops and television programmes to rock songs lyrics. Russia for the first time in its history faced so called "religious supermarket" and was absolutely confused with it. As Ekaterina Dais noticed of the period, "Disdaining nothing, rock musicians use Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and Christianity. Many rock singers sing about Satan, sometimes calling him a beast, sometimes – the Prince of Silence, sometimes with other names, up to the Sixth Forester. No one is given obvious preference: in Russian rock, you can pray to any god, the main thing is to pay homage to the emperor, that is rock itself". (Dais, 2005).

Indeed, this period was marked by appearance of several hymns dedicated to rock and each of them contained some religious maxims. In Alexander Bashlachev's song *Vrem'ia Kolokol'chikov* ("The Time of Bells") (1986), there are lines:

"And in the chest – there are sparks of electricity.
 Throw hats in the snow – and jerk more ringing.
 Rock and roll is a glorious paganism.
 I love the time of the bells."

Konstantin Kinchev in his song *Vse eto Rock-n-Roll* ("All these is Rock-n-Roll") gave such description of that time and his attitude to rock music:

"Talking in sleepy kitchens,
 Dancing on drunken tables,
 Where muses have chosen the toilets
 And gods live in mirrors,
 Where everyone deep inside is Sid Vicious,
 But in reality they're Iosif Kobzon²
 Where the motto is strong, "Who will be faster,
 you or him?"
 All this is rock 'n roll! Rock 'n roll!"

At that time, the comparison of the rock concert with the satanic (black) mass had already ceased to occur, but musicians from Siberia could have had a comparison of their activities with shaman's ritual. For example, E. Letov, the leader of the punk group from Omsk *Grazhdanskaya Oborona* ("Civil Defense"), in 1988 defined the essence of rock, "Rock in its essence is neither music, nor art, but some kind of religious action, a type of shamanism that exists to strengthen its purpose. A person engaged in rock music comprehends life not through establishing, but through destruction, through death. Shamanism here is the rhythm, on which improvisation is superimposed. And the more shamanism you have, the more rock. And, on the contrary, if art and music begin to predominate over shamanism, rock dies." (Letov, 2001, p. 122).

Rock Music and Religion after the Soviet Union Collapse

It has already been noted that *Russkii rok* of the 80-s was never anti-religious, nevertheless, it could not be characterized as Orthodox or even as Christian, for it reflected the bright picture of religious syncretism. Religion in all its variety was oppressed or at least disapproved in the USSR, just like generally rock music (although the rock/state relations were more complicated than that and there were some exceptions). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, rock from protest music fast become an important part of the mainstream. Some of rock stars did not survive until this new era: A. Bashlachev (in 1988), V. Tsoi (in 1990), Ya. Diaghileva (in 1991), M. Naumenko (in 1991) died and acquired a halo of cult figures. At the same time religion, above all, of course, Orthodoxy, became

mainstream and was more and more used by the authorities as a source of new national identity.

In fact, as Miklós Tomka notices, “For forty, in the Soviet Union for seventy years, politics and official expressions in public life in Eastern and Central Europe pretended that religion and churches carried no significance in themselves, as if they were easy to manipulate and could be forced back into private life to await their eventual deaths. This was always an illusion.” (Tomka, 2011, p. 2-3). But after 1991 Russia got captured by so called “Religious revival” and rock musicians played an important part in this process. Their lyrics became more philosophical, an expression of active civil position was replaced by an interest in Russian history and sources of Russian culture and identity, which eventually led them to conversion to Orthodoxy.

If back in 1990 Egor Letov, leader of *Grazhdanskaya Oborona* (“Civil defense”) sang in his song *Evangelie (ot Egora)* (“the Gospel (from Egor)”), “Smother with you obedient hands your disobedient Christ,” not long before his death in 2008 he was baptized. In fact unsurprisingly, as religiosity had always been a part of anti-soviet non-conformism, most Russian rock iconic figures, such as B. Grebenshchikov, A. Makarevich, K. Kinchev, Yu. Shevchuk, V. Butusov, D. Revyakin, P. Mamonov and others (with very rare exceptions) became Orthodox in the beginning of the 90-s. Their coming to Orthodoxy was different; the most demonstrative case, in my opinion, is the story of K. Kinchev churching. (More detail about Kinchev’s biography and work can be found in Baranovskaya (1993).

The permanent leader of *Alisa*, Kinchev, as well as the vast majority of Soviet citizens, was raised in an atheistic family. His first acquaintance with Christianity occurred at the age of 16 when his grandmother gave him the New Testament to read, which left some sign, but did not lead to baptizing. Later, according to Kinchev himself, “life proceeded in search of God and spiritual wanderings. I overestimated life around me: I paid too much attention and gave too much significance to myself. I tried to change the world. I was seeking, rushing about, studied some dubious literature, like Blavatskaya. As a result, I got stuck in drug addiction.” (Kinchev, 2005, March 10).

Conversion happened to him in 1992 after a trip to Jerusalem. His Christianization was soon reflected in his works and career. *Alisa* stopped giving concerts

during the Lent and Uspensky Fast. The band has repeatedly participated in concerts initiated by dioceses of different cities. Part of the fans and journalists criticized the artist for losing his previous energy and claimed that religiosity damaged his songwriting and creativity. Other critics believed that being something satanic, heavy rock, to which the band was increasingly gravitating, could not be combined with faith. To this Kinchev answered repeatedly, “Rock music cannot be either demonic or God’s. This is simply a mean through which a particular person shares his moods, views. The question of individual responsibility is important: where shall this arm be aimed? At good or at evil.” (Kinchev, 2005, March 10).

Judging by the fact that in 2007 *Alisa*’s leader was awarded Saint Tatyana’s order as a “mentor of the youth,” his activity has been highly recognized and appreciated by the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, his rebellious past did not pass without trace completely; for example, in 2010 at his summer concerts Kinchev performed wearing a T-shirt with an inscription “Orthodoxy or death”. It was his purposeful support of these clothes producers who had used a well-known motto inscribed on the flag of *Esphigmenou* monastery (Μονή Εσφιγμένου) in their design and had to pay fines as this line had been recognized by the court as extremist and included in the “Federal List of Extremist Materials” (art. 865). However, according to the musician, for him the line was just a paraphrase from Theophan the Recluse, “It might be different for different people, but I cannot be saved without Orthodoxy”.

Apocalyptic moods widely spread among Russian Orthodox (especially in the province) in the last two decades were fully reflected in *Alisa*’s album *Sejchas Pozzhe Chem ty Dumaesh’* (“It is Later than you Think”) (2003). The album’s title was based on the quotation from a controversial teaching of Fr. Seraphim Rose, a hieromonk of California, “It is later than you think! Hasten, therefore, to do the work of God.” In his work Kinchev talked about the futility of our attempts to somehow delay the approach of the Apocalypse not accidentally: throughout the entire album, the musician suggested that delay only served dark forces of evil and led to death. The central song of the album was “Horsemen”, in which the author tried to interpret all essential concepts of Revelation to John. Kinchev changed the riders order, rejecting

the sequence in which they had appeared in the source (victory – war – court – death) and offered his own, more optimistic, interpretation: rock (war) – court – death – light (victory). To put it simply, he saw the Apocalypse as a new Flood, designed to cleanse the earth of the Antichrist and his servants. The song finished with a pathetic description of the Houseman of Light, who was due to save the world:

“Named Light,
 The life Law
 Ore in blood
 Chime on fate,
 Love by faith
 Cross by religion
 He is the guard of Heaven.
 On a White horse
 He is coming to the world,
 Covered with Victory
 Is his Legion.
 The crowned soldier,
 The Savior’s bow
 He took from God’s hands in his.
 All what is dear for beasts
 The bow will cross with its arrow.
 So the Father heals the world.
 The light of Revelation is Holy,
 And its mystery cannot be trusted to words,
 But I’m still singing this blues to you.”

The prospect of deliverance from evil is also suggested in the main hit on the album, the song *Inok, Voin I Shut* (“The Monk, the Warrior and the Fool”) where the author shows the Russian way of fighting the Antichrist and preserving the native faith. The song is an anthem to Orthodoxy, to faith in God. It says, “It is calmer to live with God, It’s easy to die with God”. Kinchev tells us what unites the Russian people “from the beginning of time” and it is “Faith of the Motherland, the song, the prayer and the sword.” And these core values are guarded by faithful defenders of Russia: the monk, the warrior and the fool: “Safeguarding, everyone in his turn, the monk, the warrior and the fool.” This victorious triad is symbolic: the monk is the symbol of faith and wisdom, the warrior – of the just power and might, and finally, the fool – of foolishness for Christ, in which Kinchev himself has repeatedly been accused. And the rock star approves of it, “Foolishness for Christ, in my opinion, is an absolute freedom. Perhaps it might sound arrogant, but the fool can afford to look at the world and to what is happening in it, quite

condescendingly; sometimes with irony, sometimes with love, sometimes with indignation. For me, all this is absolutely harmonious.” (Kinchev, 2008).

In this song we can trace all typical for Russian revived Orthodoxy (some of them typical for other Eastern European countries as well) features. As Miklós Tomka writes, “From the middle of the 1980-s, and especially after 1989, counterbalancing the loss of trust in socio-political institutions the respect for the main traditional churches grew enormously, at least for a time, in the whole of the former communist region. [...] The sense of belonging together in a society, the question of national identity, has become vital everywhere. To strengthen such sentiments, national feelings have been or are being inflamed in many places. In this process, especially among Eastern Orthodox countries, the prevailing national Church often plays an active role, which casts a rather peculiar light on Christianity.” (Tomka, 2011, p. 8-9). For this Kinchev’s song the theme of national identity is central, but he goes further: he practically equates Russia and Orthodoxy. Russian history is being idealized and even sacralized; Russia is perceived as chosen by God (“has been bordered with God for ages”) and opposed to the rest of the world which is conceived as hostile; and the Russian military have sacred mission of guarding not just Russia, but Christianity itself. What seems quite interesting is that, although the song was written in 2003, it clearly reflects the ideology which has finally prevailed in today’s Russia, but which were not as obvious in 2003.

If Kinchev’s Orthodoxy can be characterized as direct and militant (he called himself “a faithful soldier of Orthodox Church”) (Kinchev, 2006), we can see a very different picture analyzing the works and worldview of another Russian rock idol – the permanent leader of *Akvarium* Boris Grebenshchikov. In his interviews of different years (1984, 1991, 2003, 2009) he positioned himself as an Orthodox Christian. However, along with Orthodoxy, he is also interested in such religious traditions as Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, from which he draws inspiration. In the 1990-s Grebenshchikov called himself the spiritual student of a Danish lama Ole Nydahl, a preacher of an Europeanized version of the Karma Kagyu school. The musician has repeatedly visited the ashram of the famous neo-Hindu preacher Sathya Sai Baba, translated books of modern Buddhist preachers and even published the Tibetan mantra “Refuge” (1998).

In 2007 Grebenshchikov called another well-known neo-Hindu preacher Sri Chinmoy his spiritual guru. Since 2009, he has been working on *Bhagavad Gita* translation into Russian and recently (in October, 2017) he met with the Dalai Lama in Riga.

How do all these facts relate to his statement of being Orthodox? The official website of the group gives Grebenshchikov's fully comprehensive answer, "We can say that all religions describe the same world and give the same commandments. In other words, each of them says the same thing in the language of a particular culture. I believe in what all religions tell us, and I guess that it is true." (Documenti Akvariuma, 2017). Thus, what can be by some perceived as a contradiction, is not such for the musician himself; taking an inclusive position regarding Oriental religions, he continues to call himself an Orthodox Christian. Such position has not been rare among many religious people, for example, was explicitly expressed in the phenomenological tradition of the religious studies.

Grebenshchikov's song *Velikaya Zheleznodorozhnaya Simfoniya* ("The Great Railway Symphony") from his album of 1996 *Snezhnyj Lev* ("Snow Lion") can be considered the quintessence of the musician's syncretic approach:

"I was trying to learn to be a child, I was looking for a berth for myself,

I knocked my forehead into pieces against the beginning of all beginnings,

It feels great to be spiritual – only crosses in my mind,

While a train is speeding across the world and you are in its car,

It is boring for the young to be in Heaven, but you cannot climb there being old,

Buddha is rambling at Calvary shouting «Allahu Akbar.»"

The song is obviously quite ironic and reflects the shallowness religious views of the time. However, Grebenshchikov is an author of some songs with deep religious meaning. An exemplary one is his song *Srebro Gospoda moego* ("My Lord Silver") from his album *Ravnodenstvie* ("Equinox" 1987) which is often considered to be a variation of the Twelfth Psalm:

"And the words of the Lord are flawless,

like silver purified in a crucible,

like gold[c] refined seven times." (Psalm 12:6)

In his intimate and penetrating voice Grebenshchikov sings these simple and clear words:

"I'm struck by a light arrow,
I can't be treated.

My heart is wounded,

What more could I ask for?

As if the night is tender,

As if there is still a path,

The old direct path of our love

Yet we all keep silent,

We all count and wait,

We all sing about ourselves

What else can we sing about?

But as if something is wrong,

As if the colours are blurred,

As if we again lack You.

My Lord's silver, Lord's silver,

Do I know the words to speak about you?

My Lord's silver, Lord's silver

Is higher than words, than stars, equals our grief."

Spiritual longing and religious search which could be clearly distinguished in the Russian rock songs of the 80-s was in the 90-s answered by Orthodoxy. Some of the musicians after becoming Orthodox even changed the lyrics of their famous hits; for example in his song of 1998 "Rodnaya" ("Loved one") Dmitry Revyakin sang "Who will put the cross on our graves? – A monk and a shaman", but later in his concerts he started singing "A monk, not a shaman."

Russian rock stars often cooperate with the Orthodox Church priests and organizations. Many Orthodox priests are big fans of rock music, such as, for instance, Fr. Sergij (Rybko) or Fr. Andrey Kuraev. In 1994 Fr. Vsevolod Chaplin, who is now usually considered as ultra conservative, wrote an "Introduction" to the album "Christian Rock in Russia Anthology" which was released by *All-Church Orthodox Youth Movement*. There have been several big rock concerts organized in tight cooperation with the Orthodox Church. One of them was called "Rock to Heaven" and gathered such well-known musicians as Konstantin Kinchev, Vyacheslav Butusov, Boris Grebenshchikov, Yuri Shevchuk and Olga Aref'eva (14.01.2003). Rock clubs are opened at different Orthodox missions. All these facts can be simply explained as a part of proselytism and Orthodox work with the youth. At the same time, rock music can be seen as a religious source as well. Fr. Sergij (Rybko) noticed, "Rock music and the Church have the same task – to bring people to the truth. I never thought of rock music as of a form of entertainment, it's the music that raises serious spiritual and philosophical questions". (Ivanov, 2006).

Religious doubt and atheism in Russian rock

Although the main trend concerning religion in Russian rock music was appeal to the Orthodox tradition, it must not be simplified and reduced only to the idea of religious revival. Since the late 1990-s rock bands, rock music lyrics containing religious doubt or even atheistic themes, is becoming more and more evident. This tendency is well-expressed in *Splin's* song *Bog Ustal nas Lyubit'* ("God is tired of loving us") (Granatovi album, 1998)

"I would tell you everything I know, but it mustn't be talked about,

The fallen snow will never melt,

God got tired of loving us, God got tired of loving us, Just got tired of loving us"

The band Pilot in their song *Net Vestej s Nebes* ("No news from the heaven") (album "1+1", 2008) proceeds with this topic of Godforsakenness.

"Our feet are caught in a trap by a loop!

We have nowhere to fly, we are nowhere waited for!

We are to sing our wolf songs among dogs,

Where nobody will come for us from heaven!"

Being oppressed and underground during the Soviet era, Orthodoxy was a part of freedom for many people, however, after almost total "Orthodoxization", a considerable part of musicians, especially of a younger generation, was disappointed or uninterested in religion. Such rock bands as *Korol' I shut* ("King and Fool"), *Zemfira*, *Del'fin* ("Dolphin"), *Elysium*, *LOUNA* etc., leaders position themselves as atheists. Usually it is not explicitly manifested in their lyrics, but becomes known during interviews when they answer journalists' direct questions about their religious beliefs. For example, the leader of a punk band *Korol' I shut* Mikhail Gorshenev explains, "I have already said that, whatever sadly it is, I'm an atheist. I do not believe in God. I do not like fairy tales. And I do not like them very much. If I like some, then it is exclusively Scandinavian fairy tales, mythology. Perhaps this is bad, but I believe that in fact the Bible is a fairy tale." (Gorshenev, 2012). What seems to me most interesting in his position is an expression of sadness. On the one hand, it can be interpreted in the context of problems which atheists can experience in modern Russia: being demonstratively atheistic nowadays can be almost compared to being demonstratively religious thirty

years ago. On the other hand, it might express the musician's feeling of existential loneliness, for it is broadly believed that life for religious people is simpler. We will never know the answer, as Gorshenev died in 2013.

Conclusion

Obviously, popular culture does not just reflect trends and sentiments existing in society, but also influences them and sometimes even forms them. Talking about the Russian experience, it can be easily traced in the history of Russian rock music of the 80-s and the 90-s, when rock musicians were (and sometimes still are) perceived not just as stars or idols, but as poets, philosophers, revolutionists, prophets, lords of souls and creators of new world. It is common knowledge that rock music undermined communist system and ideology and stood up for freedom, including religious freedom. What sometimes seems to be underestimated is that it was also rock music that promoted so called *religious revival* of the 90-s in Russia when most popular rock musicians reflected their own religious seeking in their lyrics. Rock lyrics of the 90-s reflected typical for that period religious seeking and syncretism, but since the 90-s most Russian rock musicians have started to position themselves as Christians, primarily Orthodox.

However, so called Russian Orthodox revival (not to say religious engagement of most Russian people) is often questioned and doubted (Furman, Kaariainen, & Karpov, 2007). Another Russian rock star Sergei Shnurov, the leader of *Leningrad*, commented it, saying, "We live in a secular society, that is, in a suicide society. No matter how hard we beat our breast, no matter how much we shout that we are an Orthodox country, we will not become more spiritual from that. Go out and ask anybody, "What is the difference between Catholics and Orthodox?" I'm sure neither the first person you meet, nor the second will give you an answer. People do not know even elementary things about their religion." (Shnurov, 2014).

References

Afanas'ev, A.S. (2013). Evangel'skij tekst v al'bome «Vtoroe prishestvie» hristianskoj rok-gruppy «Trubnyj zov». *Filologiya i kul'tura*. 2 (32), 61-64.

- Alekseev, A. S. (2009). *Kto est' kto v rossijskoj rok-muzyke*. Moscow: AST.
- Alekseev, A. S., & Burlaka, A. P. (1991). *Kto est' kto v sovetskom roke*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MP «Ostankino».
- Baranovskaya, N. (1993). *Konstantin Kinchev. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo. Stihi. Dokumentacii. Publikacii*. Saint Petersburg: Novyj gelikon.
- Blanchard J. (1992). *Pop goes the gospel: Rock in the church*. Durham, UK: Evangelical Press.
- Burlaka, A.P. (2007). *Rok-ehnciklopediya: Populyarnaya muzyka v Leningrade-Peterburge 1965 – 2005*. Vol. 1-3. Saint Petersburg: Amfora.
- Chidester, D. (2003). The church of baseball, the fetish of coca-cola, and the potlatch of rock 'n' roll: theoretical models for the study of religion in American popular culture. In D. G. Hackett (Ed.), *Religion and American Culture: A Reader* (pp. 504-520). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dais, E. (2005, January). Russkij rok i krizis sovremennoj otechestvennoj kul'tury. *Neva*, 1. Retrieved from <http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2005/1/dais11.html>
- Documenti Akvariuma. (2017, September 22). Retrieved from <http://www.aquarium.ru/documents/faq2.html>
- Eryomin, E.M. (2011). *Carskaya ohota, ili Strategii osvoeniya biblejskogo teksta v rok-poehzii B.Grebenshchikova*. Blagoveshensk: Blagoveshensk state pedagogic university.
- Furman, D., Kaariainen, K., & Karpov V. (2007). Religioznost' v Rossii v 90-e gg. XX -nachale XXI v. Novye cerkvi, starye veruyushchie – starye cerkvi, novye veruyushchie (pp.6-87). In D. Furman & K. Kaariainen (Eds.), *Religiya v postsovetskoj Rossii*. Moscow; Saint Petersburg: Letnij sad.
- Gorshenev, M. (2012, July 20). Ya ne lyublyu skazki. Prichem ochen' ne lyublyu. *Argumenty i Fakty*. Retrieved from <http://www.smol.aif.ru/culture/person/205978>
- Häger, A. (2011). Jerusalem in Uppsala. Some accounts of the relationship between a Christian rock group and its congregation. In Th. Bossius, A. Häger (Eds.), *Religion and Popular Music in Europe. New Expressions of Sacred and Secular Identity* (pp. 11-30). New York, NY: Tauris and Co Ltd.
- Howard, J. R. (1992). Contemporary Christian music: where rock meets religion. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26(1), 123-130.
- Ivanov, G. (2006, July) Protivorechiya, *Rolling Stone Russia*, 25. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.ru/music/article/725.html>
- Kinchev, K. (2005, May 21). Pytayus' borot'sya s tshcheslaviem. *Trud*. Retrieved from <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/13501.html>
- Kinchev, K. (2006). Konstantin Kinchev nazval sebya “vernym soldatom pravoslavnoj cerkvi”. *Interfaks-Religiya*. Retrieved from [interfax-religion](http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=10871)
- Kinchev, K. (2005, March 10) Moe slovo obrashcheno k yazychnikam. *Oficial'nyj sajt Moskovskogo Patriarhata*. Retrieved from <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/87869.html>
- Kinchev, K. (2008, December 29). Zhitie moe. Esli hochesh' nazyvat'sya chelovekom, neobhodimo boyat'sya obidet' Boga. *Itogi*. Retrieved from <http://www.alisa.net/prensa.php?action=2008&disk=press285>
- Kuraev, A.V. (2004). *Rok i missionerstvo: besedy s bogoslovom*. Moscow: EHKSМО.
- Kushnir, A. (1994). *Zolotoe Podpol'e. Polnaya illyustrirovannaya ehnciklopediya rok-samizdata. Istoriya. Antologiya. Bibliografiya*. Nijnii Novgorod: Dekom.
- Kushnir, A.I. (2003). *100 magnitoal'bomov sovetskogo roka. 1977 – 1991: 15 let podpol'noj zvukozapisi*. Moscow: Agraf, Kraft.
- Larson, B. (1967). *Rock and roll: The devil's diversion*. McCook, NB: Larson.
- Letov, E.I. (2001). *Ya ne veryu v anarhiyu*. Moscow: Izdatel'skij Centr, OOO List N'yu.
- Mazierska, E. (2016). *Popular music in Eastern Europe: breaking the cold war paradigm*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Nikol'skaya, T. K. (2000). Hristianskaya rok-poehziya 1990-h gg. v religiozno-obshchestvennom kontekste. *Russkaya rok-poehziya: tekst i kontekst*. Tver: Tver state university. (4), 148-153.
- Ramet, P., & Zamashchikov, S. (1990). The Soviet rock scene. *Journal of Popular Culture* 24(3), 149-174.
- Ramet, S. P. (1994). *Rocking the state: rock music and politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Romanowski, W. D. (2005). Evangelicals and Popular Music: The Contemporary Christian Music Industry (pp. 103-122). In *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Los Angeles-London: University of California Press.
- Ryback, T. (1990). *Rock around the bloc: A history of rock music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*. NY, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Seay D., & Neely M., (1986). *Stairway to heaven: the spiritual roots of rock 'n' roll from the King and*

Little Richard to Prince and Amy Grant. New York, NY: Ballantine.

Shnurov, S. (2014, December 17). U nas mnogo ehmocional'nogo, no ochen' malo osmyslennogo. *Argumenty i Fakty*. Retrieved from <http://www.aif.ru/culture/person/1408425>

Steinholt, Y. B. (2005). *Rock in the Reservation: songs from the Leningrad rock club 1981-86*. New York and Bergen, NY: Mass Media Music Scholars' Press, Inc.

Wickström, D.-E., & Steinholt, Y. B. (2009). Visions of the (holy) motherland in contemporary russian popular music: nostalgia, patriotism, religion and russkii rok. *Popular Music and Society*, 32(3), 313-330.

Tomka, M. (2011). *Expanding Religion: Religious Revival in Post-communist Central and Eastern Europe*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Discography

Trubnyi Zov. (1982). *Vtoroe prishestvie* [Audio file].

Kino. (1989). *Poslednyi Geroy* [Audio file].

Bashlachev, A. (1986). *Vrem'ia Kolokol'chikov* [Audio file].

Alisa. (1991). *Shabash* [Audio file].

Egor i Opizdenevshie. (1993). *Sto let odinochestva* [Audio file].

Alisa (2003). *Sejchas Pozzhe Chem ty Dumaesh'* [Audio file].

Akvarium. (1996). *Snezhnyj Lev* [Audio file].

Akvarium. (1987). *Ravnodenstvie* [Audio file].

Kalinov Most. (1998). *Oruzhiye* [Audio file].

Splin.(1998). *Granatovyj al'bom* [Audio file].

Pilot. (2008). *1+1* [Audio file].

Notes

1) This research was supported by a grant of Russian Fond of Fundamental Research (RFFI) (17-33-01128).

2) A popular Soviet and Post-Soviet singer, a symbol of a conformist musician, favored by the authorities.

Nikolay POLIAKOV, D.Ph., Assistant Professor at the Chair of philosophy of religion and religious studies, Saint Petersburg State University, Russia.

Address: Faculty of Philosophy, State St. Petersburg University, Mendeleevskaya linia, 5 St. Petersburg 199034, Russia.

E-mail: poliakovn@gmail.com.

Revista română de
**JURNALISM și
 COMUNICARE**