

Belarus Music: From Propaganda to Protest (+Videos)

On Saturday 13 April, around 4 pm the most popular Belarusian music channel BelMuzTV was broadcasting porn. The video engineer working at the channel for reasons which are not yet clear added a porn film to the playlist and headed off from Minsk to another city.

When discussing this incident, many Belarusian media outlets were, somewhat bizarrely, focusing not on the fact of porn broadcast but on the fact that the channel also showed videos of a blacklisted rock-group Liapis Trubetskoy on that day. Frontman of the group Siarhey Mikhalok even put an ironic video on Youtube where he denies their involvement in the incident. Belarusian authorities banned the group several years ago for political reasons.

These days Liapis Trubetskoy is the most popular rock-group in Belarus. They first became famous in the Russian speaking world during 1990s performing pop music parodies. Their second wave of popularity came at the end of 2000s, when the band started performing Ska and Punk music.

In recent years the Siarhey Mikhalok, has repeatedly criticised the Belarusian political regime in public. For this reason it is impossible to hear Liapis Trubetskoy on the radio and the band is banned from organising concerts in Belarus.

Protest Rock

The case of Liapis Trubetskoy is not unique. The Belarusian rock scene has a long tradition of protest rock criticising the political regime. From the end of the 90's to the

beginning of the 2000's, the two most popular rock groups in Belarus were N.R.M. and Neuro Dubel. They regularly performed at opposition demonstrations and the lyrics of the songs frequently made reference to the political situation in Belarus.

At the turn of the century, protest was a common trend in Belarusian rock. Both N.R.M. and Neuro Dubel played successful shows in Belarus and were headline performers at Belarusian open air festivals. The most famous of these is the Basovišča festival which has taken place in Poland, near the Belarusian border, since 1990.

From 2000 on, it is a familiar recurrence that in Belarus the police would disrupt concerts featuring protest rock bands. But targeted repression of Belarusian rock only really started at the beginning of the following decade. In 2011 Belarusian independent media published a list of banned artists. According to journalists, officials were spreading the list to radio stations. FM radio stations had to remove them from playlists.

The black list started with Liapis Trubetskoy, N.R.M. and Neuro Dubel. Now in Belarus it is impossible to hear these bands on the radio or to see them on TV. Likewise live performances of protest bands are also banned.

Loyal Pop Musicians

It is a fact of common knowledge that Lukashenka likes Russian pop music. Most Belarusian pop musicians who are allowed to perform on radio and TV copy the Russian pop scene. Lukashenka regularly attends Slavianski Bazaar – the annual pop music festival held in Vitebsk, a festival where Russian pop stars dominate. The official media describes Slavianski Bazaar as the main musical event in Belarus.

Belarusian pop singers have to demonstrate their loyalty to

the political regime by performing concerts during state holidays and election campaigns. For example during 2006 presidential election campaign Belarusian officials organised a concert tour of Belarusian pop-singers "For Belarus!"

During one such concert, the Belarusian pop-group Siabry presented the song *Listen to the Father*. In Russian speaking world Lukashenka has a nickname "Father" and the audience was identifying Lukashenka with the main character of the song. The concert was broadcast on Belarusian state TV to make sure the whole country could see the concert.

He is great and powerful!
He will not teach bad things.
Father can put everything in order
And he is way cooler than the others!

Just look around – and it's immediately obvious
Who's the boss of the house.
So listen to father!
In the morning, during the day and at night

Listen to father!
If you feel bad
Listen to father!
And everything will be alright.

Sanya

During the 2010 presidential election campaign the song *Sanya* by the little-known pop group Rockerjocker gained huge popularity. The plot of the song boils down to the relatives and friends of Sanya (a common nickname for someone named Alexander) persuading him not to leave them and as a result Sanya agrees to stay.

The musicians from Rockerjocker assured journalists that

politics was the last thing on their minds and the song was written to congratulate their friend on the occasion of his birthday party. Radio and official Belarusian TV regularly broadcasted the video and even made a video of the song.

Mommy asked you to stay with us,
Father asked you to stay with us.
If Sanya will stay with us,
Everything will be OK!

Sanya, stay with us!
We cannot be by ourselves, we cannot.
Sanya, stay with us, Sanya.
I'm with you.

A few days before the elections in response to Rockerjocker someone unknown uploaded to youtube a parody of *Sanya*, called *Sanya will go to the Hague*. The lyrics of the song hints at the future trial of Lukashenka at the International Criminal Court.

Europe asked you to go to the Hague!
People asked you to go to the Hague!
The Hague requested: Come here Sanya!
Sanya will go to the Hague!

Sania will go to the Hague,
Will go to the Hague
Everything will be OK.

Sanya will go to the Hague.
Skiing withan ice hockey stick
Everything will be OK.

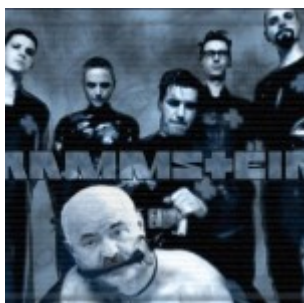
In today's Belarus, as in the last years of the USSR, music is strongly connected with politics. Some artists are against the

political regime and for that reason they cannot perform in Belarus. They perform concerts in Vilnius, Kiev and Polish cities. Some travel agencies even organise tours for fans so they can watch concerts of blacklisted Belarusian bands abroad.

Other artists are part of the state system of entertainment and they regularly have to prove their loyalty to the ruling elite by putting on shows during election campaigns in support of Lukashenka.

The propaganda songs for and against Lukashenka have become a part of the cultural landscape of Belarus. The best examples of such art are eventually becoming a part of folklore. After the current political regime has collapsed these propaganda songs still will be on Youtube and they will be able to tell us and future generations a lot about the period – the “Lukashenka times”.

Belarusian Ideologist Makes PR for a Concert of Rammstein



A senior ideologist Mikalaj Čarhiniec, who had proposed to impose censorship restrictions on a concert of the German industrial rock band Rammstein, has demonstrated what the ideology of the current political regime in Belarus is.

Official ideology of today's Belarus can be described as post-

Soviet left-wing conservatism. The Belarusian government is principally averse to democracy and civil liberties. Therefore it also has a very negative attitude towards any cultural or social phenomena like drugs legalization or the LGBT rights movement.

Belarusian bloggers and foreign media have been actively discussing the prospectives of the concert's cancellation. However, Andrej Hiro, Ambassador of Belarus to Germany, pointed out [today](#) that members of Rammstein had all received visas for Belarus and that the proposal to impose censorship restrictions on the concert had been "a private initiative".

A scandal of this kind is nothing new for Rammstein. It could only increase the popularity of the band, which is probably more famous in Belarus than in Germany itself. In show business there is no such thing as bad PR after all.

Not content to oppress the country's democratic opposition or rail against Western imperialism, the autocratic regime of Belarus has declared the German industrial rock band Rammstein to be an enemy of the state.

The country's Morality Council announced on Monday that the Berlin-based group's songs were propaganda for "violence, masochism, homosexuality and other perversions" that could "destroy the Belarusian state order." The official opprobrium calls into question a planned concert in the capital Minsk on March 7.

The Belarusian moral authorities said "permission for a Rammstein concert is a mistake that can cost us greatly" and that the band would have to have its set list approved ahead of time in order to prevent "extremism" and to ensure the "dignity" of the venue.

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