



Black Eyes
Artist Unknown

Broken Record

The Tel Aviv Museum of Art spins forbidden political protest records from the Cold War era

■ By Jennifer Greenberg

HAVE YOU EVER BELIEVED IN SOMETHING SO STRONGLY THAT YOU'D GO TO PRISON OR EVEN RISK YOUR LIFE FOR IT? Music is more than some autobiographical audio book set to 88 BPM. Since its creation, artists from every musical genre and sphere have transgressed the 'personal' in their songs, letting their own stories bleed into the stories of a culture, a nation, a movement.

Historically, music has and will always remain at the root of political protest. It was especially prevalent in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, where songs like "Machine Gun" by Jimi Hendrix, which loosely protests the Vietnam War, and Nina Simone's civil rights anthem, "Mississippi Goddam," became imperative contributions to the pressing political and social conversations.

Across the pond, just as Miss Simone was singing her first – and certainly not last – civil rights song, an important musical protest movement in the Soviet Union was coming to an end. During the roaring 20s, while American flappers were swinging freely to expressive jazz, the artists and musicians of the USSR were being stripped of their freedom – forced to "follow ideological dictates and to turn away from 'bourgeois values' and 'kow-towing to the West,' [while] those who did not comply were persecuted." In 1947, the Cold War crept under Soviet skin, transforming an already blurred concept into something unfathomable. The new exhibition belonging to Tel Aviv's Agnes and Beny Steinmetz Wing for Architecture and Design dissects the once-discrete cultural phenomenon that kept these records alive. This phenomenon was run by an underground community of bootleggers and music lovers whose number one

mission was to keep forbidden music in circulation during a fragile era. They refused to let Western jazz, rock 'n' roll, gypsy romance, and even "subversive" Russian songs, fall by the wayside; thus, channeling their frustrations into the recording and distribution of illegal copies of records (on X-ray film) deemed "forbidden" by their government. In a sense, "Forbidden Music: X-Ray Audio in the USSR, 1946-1964" is a chapter of the ongoing narrative of these records and the resistance that they represent – a complex, multi-layered narrative that extends far beyond 1964 and the reel-to-reel tape machines that eventually brought their production to a standstill.

From January 11 to May 12, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art invites the public to become a part of this covert cultural operation. On display: the original X-ray film "Bone Music" records, Soviet television clips from the 50's and 60's featuring musical productions, plus interviews and musical footage from Soviet archives, clippings from Krokodil, a satirical magazine founded in the Soviet Union in 1922, and even insight into how to produce a "Bone" record.

In addition, a bootlegger's reconstructed workshop gives visitors a behind-the-scenes glimpse into this secret world of forbidden music. Finally, as this is a historical phenomenon, the exhibition delves into documentary films that outline the use of music as a universal form of global freedom fighting – in Mali, Iran, Cambodia, and all over the Middle East.

→ Cut bone-deep into this excitingly dangerous exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 27 Shaul HaMelech Blvd, Tel Aviv (03-6077020, tamuseum.org.il)

