

**Interview with Andrei Tropillo, sound engineer,  
at AnTrop studio and record plant, Ulica Cvetochnaia,  
St. Petersburg,  
June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002.  
Part 1**

This interview was conducted by MD-player and microphone and subsequently written down and translated into English by the interviewer. The interview is divided in three-minute tracks and track numbers are listed in the text. The track numbers do not necessarily coincide with breaks in the conversation.

Y: Interviewer Yngvar Steinholt

A.T.: Andrei Tropillo

Technician: Studio technician who works in the background during interview and who adds occasional comments.

In the following, brackets or square brackets are used to:

- Signify words or phrases that have been added during translation to clarify implied points, improve readability or supply additional information.
- Add information on voice modes where this is a significant part of the message (laughter, audible smiles, ironic voice, etc.).
- Original Russian terms used by the interviewee, in italics.
- Unidentified or partly unidentified words and expressions
- My summary of phrases which could not be translated in full due to reduced audibility.
- Summaries of longer digressions, which have been left out.

For more extensive information on interview context, please see attached appendix.

TRACK 2:

Y.

Well, the first thing I wonder if you could tell me about the studio at Okhta. How that studio came into being, what kind of sound equipment you had, etc.

A.T.

The history of the studio and its emergence is of somewhat earlier origin. It relates to the year 1976. In the beginning I just wanted to... I liked that good, western, music, like, and records weren't produced here and were brought in from the West and sold for mad prices. For example at the time I bought a record, a double album by The Beatles, for 120 roubles, but the monthly salary of an engineer was 110, roubles, see? So I had this dream about pressing records. I worked at the time at the Leningrad University at the department of Geophysics and in the house I lived in, I rented a cellar from that institute, (where) I installed a little workshop or little factory for the production... I tried to set up for the production of records, having obtained even a record press and a [...dinicheskoe] section. So, well, I didn't succeed in making fully normal records of the right quality, but still I studied the whole process of how a good LP record is made and therefore learned many new and interesting things.

Parallel with this I started working with underground concerts, arranging underground concerts. Well. And, generally, in connection with arranging underground concerts, I understood that what was necessary was not so much the concerts themselves, but to record it all and pass it on to people. Especially so, because according to the existing legislation at the time, however strange that might seem, magnetic recordings were not considered to be publications in their own right, but as mechanical representations of public performances. That meant that the person who spread the recording didn't carry any responsibility.

If for example those very same song lyrics were typed on a typewriter in more than six copies and spread, the person responsible could risk up to four years imprisonment. But for four thousand copies of a tape [you risked] nothing, because only the one who wrote and performed those songs was responsible for those copies. First and foremost the one who wrote them. The rest was considered, like, that when the tape was played it was not a publication, but was like a

performance of that same author only by way of technical magnetic recording. That means that responsibility was held only by, well, for instance Galich or Vysotsky. Therefore it was as if the status of concerts and sound recordings were equally and sufficiently safe. And by the nature of things I don't know of a single person who suffered for staging underground concerts or sound recordings during the times of pre-Perestroika Soviet power.

### TRACK 3:

Y: And so You could continue your work, recording both 'studio albums' and everything...

A.T.: Yes! Yes! The only person who could be made an example of such an incident (related to running concerts, was (Zhanna) Aguzarova (from the Moscow band Bravo), who was once (arrested)... A concert was held in Moscow at which, simply, a document control was conducted and because Aguzarova had a false passport in a male name, to which her name was fakely added, the militsiia arrested her for forgery of documents. [but this had no real connections to rock and roll]. There were no more examples of that sort.

So I continued recording music and, beginning in 1977, when the staging of concerts with Mashina vremeni here was bringing in sufficiently good money... I was practically alone in inviting Mashina vremeni over at the time, I was some kind of monopolist. All the money that I received from underground concerts, and the amounts were sufficiently large... For example, I just came to think of it, for a concert in Petrodvorets, the composition *The Little Prince* was [played] there, it was I think in 1978? 79? The income amounted to 1600 roubles, an enormous sum for those days. For that money I bought microphones, mixing tables or components for them. They were quite hard to buy, but the jews, who were at the time *en masse* and *en gros* responsible for the holy earth, were selling all that they had. And here they loved jazz more than everything and before that, around ten years previously, their hero was Goloshchekin, David.

They made lots of recordings of him and built up an assembly of equipment on which they could record Goloshchekin (and his jazz orchestra). So, mainly, I bought the equipment that belonged to the jews and on which they had recorded Goloshchekin, but it was bought for him,

not *for* him, *from* him, whatever its purpose. I had gathered equipment that was, in principle, somehow possible to use. In particular Neumann-microphones emerged, very good condenser [kondenzatorskie] AKGs. They are really good even today and still today they cost 2000 dollars a piece in America. I checked it on the internet. I bought them here for 200 dollars a piece. Well, those were the prices. So I bought a mixing table, (which) I think was made from a cinema mixing table. The big casing had been chopped in half so as to demand less room. But mind you, on the first mixing table that I worked on, there were no less than six channels [khodov]. Six.

Y: And was it on that, already, that you recorded Akvarium?

A.T.: Well, not quite like that, but that equipment was used. Remember that I used quite a long time to build the studio, (beginning) from around 1977 and that all I got from concerts or any other musical enterprise I invested in the collection and purchase of equipment with which to record sound.

#### TRACK 4

So. But simultaneously I studied how to do this with the help of the modest literature available at the time. Still isn't much of that literature (around), but now we have the internet.

Y: As I've understood it, the risk involved in the business of underground concerts was receiving money from it. That illegal income was the criminal part...

A.T.: Yes, but to prove... Nobody succeeded to prove in practice the fact that money had been received, because at an underground gig no tickets were sold. If there had been real tickets that were sold it would have been speculation, yes. But if you consider that the tickets were self-made or that there were some kind of postcards... Once, for instance, I used a first-degree diploma of some Komsomol organisation with a portrait of Lenin. For some reason I dropped by the desk of this Komsomol university organisation at the Leningrad University and spotted in a dustbin there were some... [phone rings] Hello?

## TRACK 5

Hence how was it possible to arrest someone at underground concerts? One would have to stop a considerable number of people in the hall, bring them in, interrogate them as witnesses, take down their testimony [to the fact] that they had paid somebody money for those pieces of paper. But since it was unclear from whom they had been bought, since there was no box-office, achieving something in this way was very hard and during all this time the militia never went to such steps. Never ever. It didn't happen. Because underground concerts were... they were in a sense a trade with air, because people came and went without leaving any proof that money had been paid for the gig. That's why it was... At the time this known as 'sessions' [*seisheny*] and they were very popular. And I would, like, invest the income from *seisheny* in sound-equipment, say, quite primitive, but anyway, something could be achieved with it. And if you remember that in 1966 or 67 the record *Sergent Pepper's* was recorded on two four-channel tape recorders, then my equipment probably wasn't that bad for its time either.

Well, and later I tried to build a studio. I tried to build the studio at different places. First there was an attempt to build a studio at the Faculty of Psychology at the LGU, Ulica Makarova 6. The project was cleared and there were localities for a studio there and the building began. But... The idea at the time was to receive funding for the good, new equipment from the foundations of higher education, to buy as if for the Faculty of Psychology, but... The studio was to belong to the Faculty of Psychology, but to be used for musical purposes. But things went very complicated, very slow. So when it became clear that at the 2<sup>nd</sup> House of Pupils and Pioneers, it was the city house of technology for the young, there were localities, a real studio with engineering facilities and additional rooms, for soundsetting... for the recording of sound for amateur movies, and that it practically wasn't used because of lacking equipment and specialists, I set off for that house of technology for the young, which resided on Ulica Panfilova 23.

This Krasnogvardeiskii raion it was called back then. Now... No, I think it was called Krasnoutilovsk. Why do I emphasise this region? It's because the curator of this house of pioneers, house of technology for the youth, was the Leningrad Union of General Mechanics [*Leningradskoe Obshchemekhanicheskoe Ob'edinenie*] 'LOMO'. It's an organisation that

makes telescopes, a horrific number of acoustic microphones of all kinds, dynamics [dinamikov], heads [golovok]. In short (it was) a major plant that produced equipment for film studios among other things. Therefore there was already something in that studio. There were microphone stands, microphones,

#### TRACK 6

there were some kind of units, so-called, which consisted of a small mixing table and loudspeakers for soundsetting (technician caughs) [pod nazvaniem?] (called) Solist. Well, mainly, there was already some kind of technology there, that could be used. Our circle was supposed to be called 'Acoustics and sound-recording' but I renamed it 'Sound-engineering,' because that sounds better in Russian.

Well, at the time I myself was working at the Geophysics laboratory of the Faculty of Geology at the University. In the evenings I went to work with the children. So, in the beginning there was no studio there, there were facilities that weren't quite finished. One could say there were some things that needed perfecting, so to say. Like, well, make a decent wiring for acoustics, cables, microphones, reinforce the sound capacity, electricity, clear the floors. But this was easier because there was already a foundation, a basis.

So I made a (study-)circle for sound recording. The main thing was easy: record some two or three school ensembles, back then they were called VIA, Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles, and in addition take... In each circle there were supposed to be 15 pupils, as a rule, say. But usually the group was made up of five and another group of five to ten pupils, boys and girls, who wanted to learn musical skills, learn to play the Spanish guitar. And since I myself play that instrument, some were recording themselves and others were learning Spanish guitar. That is six-string guitars, you see. Well....

But in the spare time, all the rest of the time, I had the possibility of using the equipment to record what I had wanted all along. It was connected to certain difficulties, because the administration didn't approve of grown-ups coming and going. But since for example both Tsui and Grebenshchikov were still sufficiently young at the time, they didn't look that much different. More importantly there were more entrances to the House of Pioners than the front

door. There were no less than two back doors as well. That is one could get into the studio either the official way, or alternative ways later in the evenings. In summer there would be special systems of signalisation, all kinds of little lamps, buttons, closed doors that were opened at the right moments. Therefore, usually, as long as it didn't attract the attention and suspicion with the heads administration and their seniors, nobody caught us and we had the possibility of recording at night. Only without making too much noise (however), because firstly, there were people living in the houses vis-a-vis; secondly, on the first floor the porter [zavkhos] lived. At schools there are these flats for the caretaker and porter. She heard us make noise, then reported us to the director.

So I kept gathering even more equipment there. It was sufficiently easy to get by equipment before Perestroika, because radio and television, filmstudios, whatever, from time to time renewed their technology. And it was complicated for them to discard equipment, because it had to be scrapped in a special way. There was a special commission (for that). It was so much easier to pass on the equipment that was thought of as malfunctioning or outdated to institutions for children and kindergartens, er... that is to say institutions for children and recreation clubs for schoolkids. They enjoyed the status as schools too. That means that (technically) the house of pioners or house of technology for the youth was a school. Therefore I had got into the middle school for pupils up to the age of twelve, that is I have a status as a teacher and can even receive pension as a teacher, like that (laughs).

Y: Not bad!

A.T.: Well, that means (I'm a) middle-school teacher. And so I received, well of course, these little presents, some minor favours, but in principle I got a sufficient number of microphones from different radio houses and studios and so on. Sometimes they even replaced good microphones with newer ones of lesser quality, because I ended up with lots of tube microphones [explains *lampovyi* = tube]. Now they are the most expensive ones, but back then they were all still tube. So because of this in particular, when it comes to the recordings of Akvarium, there is a very good sound, because very, very good microphones ['Park?'] were used. I can say that now, since several of those mikes remained in my possession. Then I sent

some of them to my friends and they could buy them for 30 dollars a piece, so (laughs) everything was in order. They were left, like, to serve childrens' creativity. But something was bought especially for that (purpose) as well.

[mentions different mikes: Shure 58, Neumann SM2 stereotube]

[mentions 'summer support' from different institutions and his lending out a mobile recording unit which consisted of two Studer microphones, a small Studer mixing table with a twelve-channel basis, a commutation system and two or three additional mikes]

So in principle, all the time I was trying to make recordings absolutely for free with the best possible equipment.

## TRACK 8

One shouldn't think, then, that all this was done standing on the knees. It was made on equipment of sufficient quality. Many recordings hold a very good sound to this day and people, well, they can't understand how. Well, apart from that I did also rebuild our current tape recorders. We also had a big park of Soviet-built studio tape recorders, so-called MEZ-recorders, *Moskovskii Èlektromekhanicheskii Zavod*. And then I plainly rebuilt our half-professional recorders to include the speed 38 DIN per second [cm/s]. That is we have a speed, it was the speed of, approximately 15 inches per second - that equals 38, others had 19 [cm/s]. But what is it about recording speed 38 [cm/s]? It's that it differs radically from lower speeds on the point of sound quality. How? Because if two copies are made one after the other, the second copy will differ very little from the first. And before there was any multichannel recordings, I underline, recordings were made by bouncing. That means that recording was done on two tracks, or one [*bavanka*] it was called; it was the drums, the bass guitar, maybe also the rhythm guitar. Then the tape roll was placed on the recorder, recreated, was fed to the mixing table and the next (instrument) was added from the studio. And this could be repeated three, four, even five times, but of course the more bounces, the more the quality was reduced and especially (that of) the first phonogram was overcooked [*provarivalas'*]. But what is interesting is that if the recording is made on a speed like 19 [cm/s], already the first overlay makes like -er- we hear a difference between what has been added from the studio and what is



already on the roll. Immediately the artificiality of the added track is audible, that it is put together somehow. At 38 [cm/s], 15 inches per second, that difference is not audible. That is speed 38 [cm/s] allows for a radically higher quality than any other (speed).

Y: And all this had to be learned from scratch.

A.T.: Yes.

Y: Or was there any information about sound engineering available?

A.T.: Well, I made practically everything from zero, because the two locally available booklets, one of them was *Sound for Cinema and Television* [*Zvuk kino i televideniia*]. I forgot, there was an English author, it...

Technician: Nesbitt!

A.T.: One Nesbitt. He was an engineer at BBC. But there he says for instance about The Beatles' recordings, that two combinations, each of two microphones are rigged. Hence it is very like, let's say, concerning the set up only the sound of the small drum was described, well, for example. That is there was almost no information. So everything was made by the slow path of testing, failing, and then back to searching.

[vague and syntactically unclear technical details of early experiments]

## TRACK 9

And I chose all the instruments accordingly, made some corrections, afterwards all (the experiments) were left behind, remained only in my head and it wasn't necessary to do all that (again). Now, practically, the first rabbits I tested on were two bands. They were Mify and Akvarium. They were used because they came over more often for recording sessions and we worked out different recording possibilities and so on together. And we had, because our

electronics were themselves quite -mmm- prone to that, there were also some unpleasant occurrences.

[laughing, partly inaudible voice while telling about how BG received electric shocks from his headphones]

Not high voltage, but he got shocks. Well. That is how it started, step by step. To begin with results were worse, then they became better. There were different tape recorders. That is, roughly speaking, when I committed the recording of the first Akvarium album, that was an album which in principle hasn't been released yet, but on (the album) *MCA* there are two songs from it. They are *Minus 30* and *Marina*. But by now it is on the way. There will be some (other songs) there *Letaiushaia tarelka*, *Pesnia prostogo cheloveka*. These were the first, very first phonograms, like attempts to record phonograms by (way of) this interesting method.

That is first two tracks [*dorozhki*] were recorded on a Tembr recorder. One track was recorded, listened to, then those two tracks, recorded at different times, were fed to the mixing table, the studio was added and all this was recorded on a monographic MEZ 28 recorder, our [i.e. Soviet] make, on 38 [cm/s] and this was the original. Then all this was assembled, pasted, if necessary synchronised [*dublilos'*] and these originals became the masters from which the working copy was taken. Usually these originals from 1980 consisted of more than 200 little pieces and the songs were composed of such tiny little cut-outs. For many reasons. Errors were cropped, replacements from the better takes were inserted into the bad, because any kind of dubbing technique was beyond our capacities back then. So when we began working, we worked after such a scheme in the beginning. And so experience was built up gradually.

Later I got hold of a mixing table ----cherskii SS86 from a radio (station) I think. It had 18 tracks [*khodov*] and 6 lines out [*vykhodov*]. So it was. Then, that is during summer sessions I received -ah- (some) equipment from Melodiia. It was two two-channel MEZ 58, STU 163 I think, such imported devices with 38<sup>th</sup> speed and a mixing table with 12 tracks and two lines out in all, well, there were four, four lines out on that. And after that I got a mixing table from the Institute of Radioreceiving and Acoustics...

It is also interesting that just in Petersburg all the main institutes that were dealing in acoustics and sound recording were placed by Soviet planning. And the Popov Institute of Radioreceiving and Acoustics, we have that version that the radio was invented by one Popov of ours. That is, there is a Popov Institute and it is here. The institute of Radio and Television is here; the Institute of Cinematic Engineering is here, and so on. NIRPA, yes I did say that, is also here; LOMO is here. So in Petersburg, with all these technical bases, it was much easier to get hold of something than in Moscow. In Moscow it was easier to buy or bring in from abroad. For instance through Makarevich, who had a dad, some chief architect of ours, (who) travelled to exhibitions abroad and whatever EXPOs there were and could find something good. But everything here (in Leningrad), everything was made by what was at hand.

And we started working in the studio, recording something, experimenting, just like... I had this understanding of what an album [*al'bóm*] was. Because before 1987 the word 'album' was not yet used. Here we called it, if anything, something like a 'concert on tape', a 'tape-recorder concert'. In Russia back then, in Soviet Russia, an 'album' referred to a record with a colour fold-out sleeve. A 'plastinka' (record) had a single sleeve, but one with a fold-out sleeve was an album. I myself always understood by the word 'album' a conceptual collection. And the first such conceptual collection that I released was a recording of Mashina vremeni in 1977 (*Kto est' kto v sovetskom roke* states 1978), *Den' rozhdeniia* (Birthday). Makarevich had given me a heap of tapes on which were recorded some gigs, some playing of his with ----nklenov, and others, at the studio of the Moscow ITIS.

There was such an institute and today, too, there is a government institute of theatre art, GITS, and it had a studio. Today it is commercial, back then it was educational. There were also two Hungarian, STM they were called, tape recorders and a mixing table. Now, well. And the artists there, more than anything, were not singing, just dancing or doing some kinds of exercises. So at other times two groups were rehearsing there in those days. It was Mashina vremeni and Vysokosnoe leto. Actually out of these two bands came the line-up of the current Mashina vremeni, the crews merged, the old line-up dissolved, and so on.

## TRACK 11

And that was the first time I saw that in a studio like that it is possible to record something. That is I participated in test recordings. Later I found an identical studio here at the Puppet Theatre. It's the little puppet theatre at Ulica Nekrasova...

Y: ...the place where Maik recorded...

A.T.: Where Maik began recording. The record *Moia sladkaia N* was recorded there. One Alla Solovei worked her time there as a sound-engineer and there they also could record something between the different activities of the actors. But it was without doubt less comfortable to record there than at my place. And so there were a lot less recordings made there and it all died out quite quickly. What's more there was much artistic leadership there, which means they were constantly jealous about anything. While at the House of Pioners there were simply nobody there who could be jealous. Why should we be afraid of the leadership? The director was far away, we kept everything out of his way. But at the Puppet Theatre, the direction quickly put a stop to such disorder. At my place, on the other hand, it continued: the perfection of equipment, perfection of these recordings and the gradual development of a kind of competence (smiles broadly) on part of the musicians as well as the engineer, I guess.

And another main thing is that from 1980 to 81 a solid studio collective of musicians formed. It consisted, practically, of musicians who came there regularly, who played in different bands and helped each other with pleasure at any sessions. Among such musicians was saxophonist Mikhail Chernokhin, yes? Among them was drummer Evgenii Guberman. Among them was keyboardist Sergei Kurekhin. Now and a lot of others. I'm not going to list them all now, but fact is, that if we look at, for instance, the album by that very same Zoopark (called) *Belaia polosa*, you'll see. There plays the drummer Mikhail Feinshtein (Vasil'ev), who at the time for different reasons was not playing with Akvarium, but he played with Zoopark. Even look at Kino, with whom Aleksandr Titov recorded on the drum... er... on the bass guitar. He was in Akvarium at the time, but...

There was also the question concerning bands that performed quite successfully at concerts. When they were recording in the studio, when they got to hear themselves, they understood that they didn't play that good. It seemed good (to them) when they played live, but when they really saw their own audial mirror-image, they understood that this is not good. And then the adaptation of musicians began. So then there was just that same group (of musicians) that supported them on that point. Therefore a band often performed live with one line-up, recorded with a slightly different one.

This problem is now re-emerging in full scale with the band Kino. I have been a witness in court in the case of the group Kino against Marianna Tsui. I was a witness of both sides simultaneously, both for Marianna Tsui and for the band. Such a situation developed because some people were recorded, others played (live). And this studio collective took part in practically everything... Well... If it was necessary to have something played, they came and played (it). Let's say the group Strannye igry (played) for the group Alisa, because (Nikolai) Gusev would be the right man to play the keyboards. Roughly speaking, then, it was all blended together here, because often one band was recording, another band waiting its turn and there were always some musicians who kept dropping recordings, didn't show up.

Therefore there is (also) quite a lot on the recordings with my voice on it, a flute or still other kinds of instruments. Not because I imposed myself on the music making, just because someone didn't show up and therefore it was necessary: 'Now, well Tropillo can play that' (laughs). And, well, come on, would you be sorry? And then it's necessary to put some backing vocals (in) there. Or if I want to remain invisible there, suddenly Volodia Levi sings there, standing in the back, then I sing, then someone else. Who was there (at each recording) I don't remember. (It was) like that.

Y: I think (Andrei) Burlaka said something to the point that - in a western context - you would have been mentioned as a co-author of quite a few works, including Akvarium's album *Tabu*.

A.T.: No, all that is correct, but...

Y: And also when it came to composing...

A.T.: Yes, that is especially characteristic in connection with Maik's work. In fact I cooperated with Maik. Because the (musical) arrangements, those that they played at concerts, were quite wild and (when recording) we had to think them through from the beginning. In the arrangements there was also... I often suggested what to play on the guitar and so Gorbunov played just that. Therefore, when it says on the cover of Maik's album that it is produced by Zoopark and Tropillo, (it also means that) the arrangements there are Zoopark - Tropillo. It means simply that if, for instance, Maik wrote that, then Boria Grebenshchikov - would, like step aside, although some elements were also partly his. But I couldn't tell which and where.

Let's take a song from (Akvarium's 1981 album) *Treugol'nik*. There is (the song) *Misha iz goroda skripiashchikh statui*. From the very beginning that flute solo wasn't given to me by anybody. I thought it out myself, you see. Now for example. Or with Kino it was the same; you play, you accompany, especially it was like that with the record 45. So (speaking of) co-authorship, I never really got into the position of co-author, because, it's as if (it was) enough (like that). I was, without any doubt, (already) a contributor by keeping the rights of producer of the so-called mechanic recording. My part of the rights cannot be doubted and really now with the last agreement for production of the eight first albums by Akvarium, I really do receive money as the engineer of the recordings. And the same goes for Kino, the same goes for Zoopark.

A different question is that there are, apparently, full-scale piracy companies like, let's say, Moroz Records. That is, plainly, a pirate company that doesn't pay (anybody) - period. That's its way. It doesn't pay not only me, it doesn't pay the real performers, the real contributors to Kino, you see.

[Some more critique against Moroz Records. Then: he sees some of his recordings in the catalogs of other companies without having given them the rights and without receiving any compensation. In the end phone rings]

## TRACK 14

So I'd like to say, that's the main thought that I want to express here, not only (do I have) my (part of the) rights there (in composing and playing), but I don't give a damn [*na eto naplevat'*] (about that). I did my things that way and did them, like... Actually all the rock [and] roll was heard through my ears. And everyone can confirm that without me Russian rock couldn't have existed, that they would all have gone on about rock [and] roll not being possible to write in the Russian language, that its phonemes don't fit. (phone rings).

## TRACK 15

Yes, now, the main thing is that in that period I count from 1981 to '84 some kind of a creative association of studio musicians was founded, which did its job brilliantly and began working most successfully with Russian rock [and] roll. (It was) absolutely independently from the LRC, but parallel to it. It even started a year before the rock club at that. And (it was) practically under my leadership, because I directed it, recorded it. Through my ears came the first citations. I picked out what was good, what was bad, and that's why it can be said that Russian rock [and] roll initially went through one head, through one pair of ears, through one place, through one studio collective. That way it was born, all (of it). There was a unity of place, action and people, an ideal accompaniment for the inevitable, normal course (it took).

[Walks away to open the door while talking. Somebody has been knocking increasingly loudly at it for the past minute]

## TRACK 16

Unity of place, of place and performers. It was practically one such creative collective. So, just for the record I also heard Rybin and Tsui for the first time at the DK Lensoveta. Because we were doing, at the time I was still doing concerts with Mashina veremeni around the time when Mashina vremeni went professional, right? But then I started instead to arrange concerts with Akvarium, and to these gigs came other musicians too. Among others these (came), Rybin and Tsui at Lensoveta and they also came to the studio with Boria (Grebenshchikov), (and) started to record a record. The first (was) without Boria, but for the second, *Nachal'nik Kamchatki*, Boria said that he wanted to be a producer.

Y: But instead he played the casiotone...

A.T.: The casiotone. He came to play two or so themes on the casiotone, then he simply stopped coming. But no, it's as if all that was in fact... I personally liked all that, because the work progressed, we got results and we released albums which were conceptually prepared. They were made up, not only of the songs that were available, but (songs) selected and composed into a bigger entity. They had some kind of common thoughts or feelings, and that is what has always been, it seems, the album form. And there was always prepared some kind of designs for them. That is it was a tape recorder formula of some sort, that was supposed to respond fully to the conception of a western album. To ensure that this was distributed to the people, I (gave it away) for free in very high quality (originals). It was made first at speed 38 [cm/s], then on 19 [cm/s] for cassettes. These original phonograms (were handed over) to the so-called cooperatives for sound recording, which existed in big numbers at the time.

Y: Could you say approximately how many copies were made?

A.T.: Yes, in principle I gave away ten or so originals, high-quality originals that were re-copied, surely. But I recon that the number of recordings, in any case if judging from the number of cities I've seen them in, is evidently a million copies. [...] You know how rabbits multiply, right. Actually there is full correspondence between (that and) the system of magnitizdat... [...] (laughs) No factory can ever compete with that. And it all gets (out) there, too. And, mind you, it was absolutely safe at that.

And to that I might add, that the kids who came there, to that studio, because they did come there too and I didn't choose the most untalented of them either, on the contrary. I can tell you that from the ones that went here from the fifth, sixth and seventh grade, emerged such names as Lesha Vishnia, that same, Diadia Fedor of the band Nol', Fedor Chistiakov that is, yes.

[continues about Chistiakov, his pupils and their present whereabouts]

[complains of the present lack of schooling of sound engineers, which should start from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to be successful, he underlines]



Y: Could you tell a bit more in detail about some of the albums. I'm thinking of Akvarium's *Tabu*, its recording. It's the first 'electric' album...

A.T.: How come 'electric'?

Y: Well, from the sound of it.

A.T.: Yes, electric.

Y: And Maik's *Uezdnyi Gorod N* and (Kino's) *Nachal'nik Kamchatki*. I have picked those for closer analysis, therefore I'm particularly interested in hearing a bit more about those.

A.T.: To that I'd like to say that thinking of how fashionable the style unplugged has become in the West in recent years, it was in my view born here earlier. Because among us that was called 'akustika' and it happened here out of poverty, because there were few good electric instruments around. Therefore everything was accomplished with acoustic instruments. But, in principle, when I heard about those unplugged things (over) there, I thought that this is what we made twelve years ago (laughs) in the evenings. Now and about electricity, that *Tabu* is the first electric album is not entirely right, because I already said that the song *Minus 30...* Let's listen to it now so it may be clear from now on that it is no less electric.

Y: What I wanted to say was that *Tabu* might have been the first album that was played electrically as a whole. But, clearly electric songs occurred before that. Some. But on that one Liapin's guitar sounds all the time.

A.T.: Now well it's just that 1980, 81, 82, up until 1983 were years, if speaking about Akvarium, when the arrangements were made, well, fewer arrangements were produced by way of involving other musicians. That is to say that nobody knew the arrangements. Here is a song and if we invite Titov to play the bass, the bass will be like this. Afterwards there was yet another bassist, I don't remember (who). It's possible that someone just picked up the

instrument and that's the way it became (the way it did). We tried several guitarists there. What was the name of one such guitarist, Volodia? Volodia what? Wasn't it Danilov, his family name? He tried to play there too, together with whoever we had to chose from on the guitar. He played a little, but he, well, Liapin was better. So again the arrangements changed between different musicians from the studio collective. And Liapin was a member of that collective and he played with great pleasure when asked to, but still you may say, his playing didn't remain everywhere, because of the way it was. So therefore there was a point where Liapin emerged in Akvarium. Liapin emerged... (song begins playing) There! Here I put on Minus 30. It's a recording from 1980 and this is on electric... This goes as the beginning of the electric set. This recording is already 23 years old.

There is something like an original here, that is to say after the principle of two tracks from the beginning. The first this track was recorded, then we listened to that recording, afterwards it goes transferred to the (mixing) table. Then we bounced it and added more instruments from the studio.

END OF PART 1

**Interview with Andrei Tropillo, sound engineer,  
at AnTrop studio and record plant, Ulica Cvetochnaia,  
St. Petersburg,  
June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002.  
Part 2**

TRACK 1

Y: How did your personal musical tastes influence your sound engineering work?

A.T.: I used what I liked. For instance on Kino's (album) *45* there are (some) very beautiful themes. For example *Here, there and everywhere* from The Beatles' (album) *Revolver* was used. I didn't yet ask you how you figure it, what musical taste is, how it occurs? Let's say the musicians often come with a theme. I wouldn't like to go behind Little Boris' (Grebenshchikov) back and insult him on this, but he came with a theme for one of our monsters, or what. Hearing it, I say:

-Sorry, but that's *Sunny Afternoon* by The Kinks!

-A-a-a, yes!

He starts afresh on another one and here comes Kurekhin and says:

-But now it's the cleanest The Doors!

-Aaa-ha...

Like that, but later, little by little, from slowly moving away (from that) a new theme is born that is neither Kinks, nor Doors, nor (heh, heh) Cream, but something fully original. This kind of things happened, too. It's just a bit unpleasant to speak about it, because people may be offended by it, but it was also, in part, like that.

[Another, less clear example made about Kino co-founder Rybin]

In addition to that there is, in general, I think, one interesting, characteristic quality of this. That Russian rock-n-roll was born from authorised translations of western rock-n-roll and,

how to say, an environment was transferred here, a language environment, namely the symbolic language of rock-n-roll.

## TRACK 2

In the beginning both Maik and Boria (Grebenshchikov) imported and wrote a first-hand source for themselves as skilled instrumental translators, yes? Afterwards, gradually, they started to forget that translation because the things were successful and began living their own independent lives. And then began the most interesting metamorphosis, where the authors themselves were reborn and the second generation... For instance I count Tsui not to the first, fundamental layer, but to the second layer, to the children of that first layer. The first layer, that is musicians like (Boris) Grebenshchikov, Maik Naumenko, Sergei Danilov of Mify, like Iura Stepanov, who now lives in London.

They came from such a rock-n-roll line, let's say there is something like a Beat era a little before rock, (with) Vladimir Rekshan, Korzinin, Nikita Zaicev, Yes? So, well, anyway a guy like Tsui, a guy like Kostia Kinchev, those represent the second generation, that in the end heard that symbolic language that Boria (Grebenshchikov) brought them. Well, here I have mainly Grebenshchikov and Maik in mind. But what is really interesting here is that Grebenshchikov and Maik themselves gradually began writing new things that were their own, utilising that same language that had been given them from the original western things. And that was the main point of change; Russian rock emerged and all the dogmatics nagging about how Russian rock cannot exist, about how it doesn't fit the meter of the language, with the meter of the ballad, all that was exposed as utter nonsense. As I used to say then, any schoolkid can write rock [and] roll.

Unfortunately, nowadays, because of the gradual degradation of the Russian form of rock-n-roll into pops, many have again taken to believe that Russian rock [and] roll does not exist. And I'm often invited to listen to different bands of ours and hear them say that rock can't be sung in Russian. How can that be? Well, get lost! [*Bog s vami!*] And that's it. They say that it works in English, in Russian it turns into pops. And I explain to them that they can't (sing in English). Thing's need to develop anew. The degradation started exactly with Perestroika.

Practically, in my opinion, rock-n-roll effectively began dying from 1985 or 1986, when its degradation processes were already up and running. It came to my studio with Gorbachev, and I was replaced as it turned out later... Mr. Kovalchuk of the house of Pioneers, may he be granted his heavenly reward, told me about it. A new curator came regional department of the People's Education Committee. There were new curators from the security committee and they literally told him: 'You'd better kill off that charity bin!'.

### TRACK 3

And I had just rebuilt the studio. I had, to put it outright, made a new studio there, restored the place, everything. And I was invited with the band Nol', with Chistiakov, to Moscow to a festival at VDNKh, the Green Hall. We went there. When we came back I was told that I had left my post. In fact it was more something like: 'go on and write a letter to the effect that you wish to resign!' Well. Well, I wrote something, what was there to do? And afterwards they explained to me, that they just couldn't do anything, that they had their orders. But before that curator, for some reason, everything went just fine. So maybe they were curators somehow connected to the Rock Club, I don't know, but in short there arrived... New power brings a new broom (the saying goes), and for me that change cost me my studio, I can say. Then began all kinds of headaches already with moving all my equipment into the white hall on Ulica Rubinshteina 13, that is the LMDST, the Rock Club. But there was nothing and it was most uncomfortable to work there, hence I tried to find a new place. In the end I found it on Bol'shoi Prospekt 18 on the Petrogradskaia storona, where the Zekundov East European Institute of Psychoanalysis still resides. There I sat for 12 years in that little spot. But then it's of course an even greater pleasure to have moved in here.

[Goes on about how he wants his new studio to be, how he wants to build up a new studio collective of musicians, etc.]

### TRACK 4

So, there you have it. For me the epoch of Gorbachev is connected not only to, say, the commercialisation of rock-n-roll, but also to the end of one of my first such former projects,

that studio at Ulica Panfilova 23 at the House of Pioners and Pupils no. 2, Krasnogvardeiskii region.

[about schoolkids who now come to interview him]

But they ask me, too, and I explain to them all, that in fact that revolution in the form that they understand it didn't happen. I believe that the revolution came quite a lot earlier, it was in the west. It was sex, drugs and rock-n-roll and we made it a reality here. Just this rock revolution, just that cultural understanding of what goes on, it actually torpedoed society on that level, but as a result the Gorbachevians, the *perestroichki*, came to power and they didn't do anything to perfect it, merely exploited its results. But the rock revolution really happened, it happened somewhere in the interval between 1981 and 1986. There. And much of it was in fact due to my efforts, because it caused such a boom of information, it couldn't be compared to anything else, not with any sad, fruitless efforts of that very same Solshenitsyn with his *Gulag Archipelago*. All that is entirely on another level. That's it.

[goes on with now being the time to start this rock-n-roll thing again]

There was a question about *Uezdnyi gorod N*, about the musical tendencies in it. I can say that *Uezdnyi gorod N* probably wouldn't have been neither as an album nor as a recording (a song), because Maik never got around to singing it. It was just that once, as usual, somebody didn't turn up (at the studio)...

#### TRACK 5

Mm, well it's just a standard situation when musicians don't show up for recordings, that's for sure. And so Maik came alone and we thought that we had something to put on the tape here. Well, Maik remarked that he had this song, but it's very long (he said) 'I never tried to sing it, it's not a song I can sing, and I can't play it either.' And then came some drummer from a band called Sekret, I've forgotten his name, well, a skinny one, and a boy we picked up, one who was at the House of Pioners and who we picked up when we went for a coffee at the café. We simply made a loop. Back then we never made loops, so I called it a 'circle'. (I said): 'Let's

make a circle and you try to sing to it.' I had an American cassette at hand. Earlier there was such a standard of cassettes, not with 4,7 mm tape but 6,35 mm, on which there were eight tracks or four stereo tracks. They were called cartridges. That's such an Engl... American system, such a big cassette. The tape is of a special kind with a silicon surface on the backside, and it came in different lengths, but the main thing was that it could play continuously. So I recorded a 51-second circle on it. [...] I recorded that circle on 38 (15 cm./sec.) and put it on the tape recorder afterwards, and Maik managed to sing the all verses three times. That is to say I assembled them and on that, on that assembly of loops with Maik's vocals on it. People then played some kinds of little solos in one take and there was the song *Uezdnyi gorod N*.

Well after that Maik always refused to play it at gigs, because it is such a child, born on my desk, let's say, under clean studio conditions. Well I saw at concerts that Maik tried to sing it, but it was hard. It's long and, well... also the band usually dissolves completely towards the end of it. But the song I regard as unique and it's different from Bob Dylan's song, which I think is much more simple. Because Bob Dylan's song is merely listing living celebrities.

Y: *Desolation Row*?

A.T.: Yes, but in Maik's (song) there is much more material. There's also Ivan Durachok and Mona Lisa and Marilyn Monroe and Mayakovsky and Jesus Christ [...]. It is not only some kind of [...] Hollywood community as in Dylan-Zimmerman's. It is practically the whole layer so to say of that culture, whose formula has formed the consciousness of now, so to say, the Russian intelligentsia, right? And therefore it is that much more interesting and therefore much deeper than Dylan's (song) at that. They are simply on different (levels)... That is the songs are both interesting of course.

## TRACK 6

Y: You mentioned sex, drugs and rock-n-roll, but it seems to me that there is generally not much sex in Russian rock

A.T.: Not very much?

Y: Well, surely some of in Maik's things there is, but with the others it's very discreet if... all very decent.

A.T.: Of course it's interesting to talk about sex. But what do we understand by sex? For it is clear what all that (eventually) turns into. For that revolution which destroyed the iron curtain from both sides in its time, it (the curtain) was destroyed from our side and from the western (side), but the west fought in its own way. Note that, say, but (after that) musically came this poppy, the very same... Oh lord... Even rhythm... mhm... Discotheque! What is that discotheque music called (clicks fingers) Disco! That's it, right? Instead of drugs came simply narcotics, that is instead of consciousness-expanding substances came simply the usual euphoria so to say, overdose I don't know what. But it isn't euphoria I want to criticise, but simply epidemic narcomania. And instead of sex came pornography. That is what the hippies demonstrated on the roofs of Volkswagen Beetles became genuine porn. But in Russian rock there is no porn, but there is as much sex as you may wish, because... Well, let's take an example here, Maik's song *Sed'moe nebo* (*Seventh heaven*), it goes like this:

No kolenki druzhat  
I krutitsia golova  
I esli ti pervyi ne stolknes' menia vniz  
Rano ili pozdno ia stolknu tebia  
Poslushai milyi ved' eto strashno  
Postavit' vsiu zhizn' ni na komu na menia  
Zabud' vse, chto ia skazal tebe i  
Ia snova khochu tebia

If that is not sex, okay. But isn't it sex in Grebenshchikov's things, or what?

Vse, chto ia pel obiasneniia liubvi  
Togo u kogo za spinoi stavil dom

Y: Well, yes, but in BG's think you can find practically anything you like, if...

A.T.: I can't fight with that notion, but what about Kostia Kinchev? He has on the whole a song with which nobody can compete. I simply consider it a comprehensive view that not a single



time, well, I don't know that. It's not a song it's something more, it is some -mmm- no, not mantra, it is simply a command. I'm thinking of a work called *Ko mne (To me)* and I don't know of a more sexually loaded little song. I'll even make the following clear: We simply don't have... In (Russian) rock [and] roll there is none of that chattering on the theme 'come here', 'I want you', the so-called 'love - dovey' (*liubov'-markov*) and so on. All such things flow out into the pops here and that's the point on which it differs (from rock). In that sense rock started something (new) and proved its existence to the councils in Moscow and so on. And then I said, that in 200 years only Russian rock will remain, like Russian ballet.

#### TRACK 7

And it will come to that, because it is stored here (points to his head). Unfortunately I wasn't right anyway in (saying) that Russian rock never will be such a big, dominating culture, because our people wants to have (everything) fast. Well, that is, pops is accessible, they (the people) want to listen to something accessible, that doesn't demand that you go through something. They want to hear music to which you can peel potatoes. But Russian rock, if understood as the thing I worked with, is a kind of music you can't peel potatoes to. You'd cut your fingers. And therefore rock and pops are different things. I think we have so many songs about love that the question is, excuse me, a bit off the mark. Is it on *S utra shel sneg* (Akvarium album)? I don't know. No, not there! And *Strannye igry*, no, not that, they have, although the lyrics are not their own, the song *Motociklisty* (mumbles-hums-sings:)

Neopticinista  
on liubil motociklistku  
ne v tom pessimistku  
(etc.)

And *Piknik* has a lot, too. There are simply just no direct references to, I don't know, to how to behave, it's like if... It doesn't quite fit the Russian language, you see. The thing is that Russian rock is not melodramatic. That is why all those American movies are bad. It's the melodrama. There the good are always good and fighting the bad, who are bad, and in the end the good-good bury the bad-bad and happy ending, right? But the Russian idea is entirely different: All people are half good, half bad and each is fighting within himself. He says the one thing and it occurs that he...Here he has given his last shirt to a child and then he chops up this granny with

an axe, right? Russians. Therefore we can never agree on anything. Russian rock-n-roll is fully... ni-i.... It's no melodrama and therefore I find it funny when... Yesterday they showed this movie of sorts, *Doroga v Bruklin (The Road to Brooklyn)* I think it was called, and they managed to call it a 'Russian melodrama'. Some detective story, like. But I understood, that if there's something Russians are not capable of it is melodrama. They can't do it and that's final. It's not our thing. It's all artificial. Rubbish.

What other questions did you have about rock-n-roll?

Y: I could ask about how you worked with your equipment. There are producers, Holger Czukay, to pick an example, who have made wonders with impossibly little equipment.

A.T.: What was his last name?

Y: Czukay, from the 70s German band Can.

A.T.: Yes, Can.

Y: And there are others, let's say British new-wave producers like John Leckie, who had access to the latest technology but made quite minimalistic-sounding things...

A.T.: I got that. I never had such a technical approach to things. I always used what was at hand. In that sense I'm some kind of a mystic. I think that what is at hand is also what is required in that moment, because I told you that it all began with me recording on a Tembr DN tape recorder, converted to speed 38 [cm/s] on mono, right? After that I recorded by bouncing on a Studer, then an eight-channel Amplex tape-recorder emerged, yes? That was already 1984, 1985. It was a great step forward. But generally I think that one should stick to a minimal formula, because when there are very many possibilities you sow not only what you need, but also what you don't need, and to get rid of the latter afterwards is always very hard. First, there are a thousand possibilities, you see that if you have to choose between all these possibilities a lifetime won't suffice. And when it comes to that I have generally, roughly (speaking), two

little periods in my life. That is direct recording or dubbing. What's good with dubbing? Well with dubbing I recorded a rhythmic click track and (then) record in three takes [*dubli*]. I know that more than three takes are not necessary, because then begins the mess and errors (on the part of the musicians) and even if there are no errors their performance itself gets dead, weak. So there is no need to make too many takes. And afterwards from the three to five takes, the best one is selected or the three pieces are cut out and pasted together or something, and out of this comes an acceptable phonogram.

And this phonogram is not subject to any more editing, save for some timbral adjustments. After that, let's say, the voice is added or some kind of two-handed instrument. Again, when (the process) has started, it doesn't undergo any more editing and that means that towards the end of a studio recording session, on the third take, I get a finished result immediately, to which we might make some minor dynamic compressions. Though I (generally) regard compression a bad thing, which can make unending damages to the sound, and which just doesn't help, it can be more convenient in order to achieve... The compressed sound is easier to transfer via cable for, I don't know, recording on a record, but then that doesn't have any consequences for the sound quality. In short, then, we get a result that is ready immediately.

But when I do multichannel recordings there is the possibility of always changing the balance. Somewhere I've brought in an experiment, and to change the placing of that source, that instrument, make everything broader or narrower. There are possibilities for actively influencing it, right? Therefore the number of possibilities increase by many times, hence you are (easily) tempted to take the sound from someone. So today many sound engineers switch off their imagination and say:

-And who do you want to sound like?

And the band says:

-We want to sound like U2.

Well, then let's put on U2 and begin, so to say to stick to everything in the light of that, which is sufficiently easy with the help of contemporary technology. But the result of this is not at all original, entirely secondary.

If you record too much on a multichannel recording, you record all these noises and errors and all kinds of unnecessary things that, you would have done better without in the first place. But they always remind the engineer about their existence somewhere and afterwards, because of that, it squeezes in and results in a porridge-like (sound) quality. Yes. For instance I think that when there are few channels, but on those few channels there are many instruments, the sound comes out much better. If, let's say, you record 16 instruments, but they sound like this: only six instruments sound all the time, the others emerge somewhere (occasionally). So that on the track, where the instrument doesn't sound you can record two or three instruments and afterwards, on the spot where it's needed, enhance that instrument to the necessary level and apply the parameters where they are needed, then go back.

In this way you get a lot less noises and different intramodulatory temptations than when you record everything on different channels. When I record on separate channels, the sound seems to add up in a way, like, I don't know, pouring wine or juice into water. The more channels involved, the more everything is added up by the output. Therefore, my view is: Stick to the minimal forces or means as far as you can, and your end result will be better and more lively.

Hence here and now in this studio we can in principle have 32 accessible channels for recording, including (an additional) 16 analogue ones, and (even) more for the reproduction of that. Yet I don't know if that's good. I suspect that it isn't actually good. It can be necessary for something. For example if it is at hand at a festival and you have to record all channels and microphones simultaneously, and we have to record on all 32 channels to avoid engineer overheating during the recording, it would simply be daft to add up more on one channel. Primitive. In such cases we (rather) record it all and get on with it later. So multi-channel recording unfortunately often leads to the situation that one studio session is held, then a second, then ten years passes and a third one is held, then after twenty years yet another and all the time with different results. And in the end people say:

-Well, listen! Anyway the first one was the better, just throw all that away!

In that sense dub technique or direct recording is much better. There is such a song on the album *Tabu* [In fact the song is from another album]. It's here. Maybe I should put it on. It's called *Sentiabr* (*September*) I'll show you.

Y: Yes, I know that one.

A.T.: You know it, yes? But do you know whereby it differs, it is the only complex musical work

TRACK 10

which was recorded without any bounces or dubs. It is played simultaneously by all, separately. Everybody were in different rooms and it is all played directly in one take. And therefore the sound quality there is brilliant. I don't know if the one on the record is the original, but it came out that good quite by accident. I use to say, though, that if you use not too many channels, fill them full of information and then [*raspykhat*'], you get a very high quality result as well. So I have recorded using different methods, depending on the equipment at hand, but I always made an effort to minimalise and I still do that today. And I also made sure to use a maximum number of condenser microphones only. I can hear very well how dynamic microphones colour the sound and at that they don't only colour, they also seem to make (the sound) dull [*oni tozhe túp-iát* (imitates the sound)]. But here we everything, including tall ones. But again those tall ones are not entirely real-sounding, they seem to be made to compensate, they are as if stretched out. And to me, of course, they don't have a real, clear sound, because I'm speaking as a fan of reactive microphones, of such a reactive sound.

I can add to the last question that if I should speak about who I feel closer to among western producers and sound engineers, then (I'll say) George Martin, of course. And I'm aware of his status as a special cult-figure.

[Continues on history of the Russian word *prodiuzer* and a tale of Alla Pugacheva, himself and that word]

Y: It was the question about Russian qualities in rock music. Do you think there are specific Russian qualities in Russian rock music? I have observed that the voice is very often up-front. If in western rock, the vocals tend to be mixed more into the music, here it sounds very clear, very distinct.

A.T.: I see, but I think, I think that one can't speak about... No, no. But I would like to say that the voice should restrain, that Russian lyrics should restrain the rock-n-roll form. But rock-n-roll in itself doesn't like the voice to have a too prominent position, and because of this comes its restr... Well, it's as if it's placed in the music here as well. I think there is a different stylistic approach that allows this to be done, but let's say there are all kinds of excitors and such, which are means that enrich the spectre of the voice with additional harmonies. With that the vocals can be made more silent, but it becomes as if it's sitting in the music. Or one can make a corresponding phonogram, that marks out a timbral environment where the voice can unfold itself at a higher quality.

But anyhow, for me, of course, anyway when it is in Russian, you and I are saying 'Russian', then the language should to some level be in the foreground, because there is rock over in England, there is in principle German rock, yes? And so on. So to me, the voice should be, let's say, messing it up in there. Although it is not necessarily (always) so, because by Russian rock I understand also the music of a band like Fedia Chistiakov's, Nol'. (This is) because I regard the accordeon [*baian*] a Russian instrument. It was in a sense brought into the (rock [and] roll) world by Fedia Chistiakov and myself. And after that everybody started using it. And look at how, say, Chistiakov uses his *baian* in rock [and] roll. That's a Russian way and therefore the voice, too, can be moved to a secondary level, because here we already have a technical basis.

#### TRACK12

The use of that instrument gives an instant colouring, as with the balalaika and so on. And look at how ungifted in that sense [is the way that] Akvarium use the accordeon. There is, you see, some incomprehensible dead Irish stuff in it, (mixed) with something else. But there's nothing, there is nothing particularly Russian in it. The instruments are fully identical, but still different. That's why there has to be a voice in the latter case, because it doesn't have that national element that characterises it concretely. And in my view it isn't (there), because the recent Akvarium's way of playing the bayan or accordeon isn't very successful. And we have a sufficient number of bands that play in that way. But there are also some good copies of the *baian* sound of that very same Chistiakov around. So, if there are Russian (instrumental)

elements, of course the voice can play a secondary role. And generally speaking, you see, that the voice doesn't restrain (the music) is not quite as important to me as the accessibility of the lyrics.

But if we start to speak about some kind of personality, a new subject instantly appears. Look at what we found interesting in the west. There a person's voice, let's say like John Lennon's, is always on the level. There people also have an understanding of a good voice as one that makes all its intonations immediately audible. If you make a voice, roughly speaking, that manages to bring the very signal to its boiling point, to the borders of its capabilities, you will hear its tiniest intonation. That is its core, the structure of its tone, its feeling and so on. Take that voice and enrich it with harmonies, leave it a timbral space and you will hear all the information but not the feeling that it conveys. You will hear only... For Russ... It seems to me that it is of the highest importance to Russian rock to convey an intonation in arrangements. Therefore, if you pick those very albums of mine from back then, there... Well for instance it reads on an album sleeve by Alisa: 'dramatisation and intonational arrangements: Andrei Tropillo'.

That means that I demanded of (Alisa lead singer Konstantin) Kinchev, we were recording for half a year, that he should convey intonation. I told him: 'Look at a cat or a dog. It doesn't understand the words it understands only the intonation of words and a good master with an intonation can stand there and say "down!" and the dog lies down. Hence it gets the intonation. If you want to convey intonation you must control your voice automatically. It's supposed to be... [incomprehensible phrase] It's not so much supposed to fill in that space as to fill in the whole recording.' If you don't want to do that, then what you're after is some kind of singing like Presniakov's or Baskov's, no matter if there is nothing even reminiscent of voice control (in their singing) and (maybe) that's just as well. [some more inaudible phrases on Dylan's singing style]

Y: But that intonation can also come from the instruments, guitars or other...

A.T.: Yes it can, if there is an instrument that... For Russian rock [and] roll I regard such instruments as the classic guitar, even sooner the balalaika, the bayan capable (of playing such a role). Well I simply wouldn't know what more there could be, really.

Y: Also it seems to me, I don't know for what reasons, but that there's very little punk rock in the rock music of that time, that era.

A.T.: We-e-e-ll

Y: Instead there are more blues elements than, for instance, in UK at that time.

A.T.: Come again. You want to say that there's more blues than punk over here?

Y: Yes, I think so.

A.T.: At that time or generally?

Y: At that time, the beginning of the 80s.

A.T.: Well, I can't agree with that either. Thing is that everything's, on the contrary, all this music is made with considerable irony. And it is all, so to say, but I don't know if you'll understand... Sometimes we call it *stëbovaya* [*steb* = joke, harsh ridicule, to make a fool of someone]. I think we generally have more of the punkish in our music than there is in many other cultures. That goes for Maik, too, excuse me, let's take:

Ia podnimaius' kazhdoe utro  
Ko mne prikhodiat moi druz'ia  
Ia znaiu im davno plevat' drug na druga

And it goes... Ia v rebro... No, it doesn't...

I u menia est' zhaba redkostnaia dura  
I ia bubu eë kazhdyi den'



I nam davno plevat' drug na druga  
 Ia by brosil eë, no brosat' - eto len'  
 Ia ne znaiu zachem ia zhivu, da no i bu s nim

Isn't that punk? That's pure punk! Or this one:

Zdravstvuite ia rodom iz Bobruskoi  
 Ia guru, a po-vashemu uchitel'

It's pure punk, and I don't even talk about such a punk rock monster, so to say, as our Andrei Panov - 'Svin', if you know him.

Y: I do.

A.T.: You know that one. And remember - that is not quite punk. Punk is a bit artificial, but in the Russian culture there is such an idea of *jesterhood* [*skomorochestvo*]. It helps to know that in old time Russia people were executed for *skomorochestvo*, beheaded or hanged. Well, but jesters [*skomorochi*] were always there and still are, and in that sense Panov is a genuine Russian *skomorokh* in the full sense of that word. *Skomorochestvo* is in a sense the cornerstone of Russian artistry. And that makes any person who plays (upon) that a *skomorokh* here, and it makes him a punk as well. I could say something else. That everybody who sang here were a bit punk, all a bit *skomorokh*, all of them: Grebenshchikov and Maik and Borzykin and Kostia Kinchev that matches them all. Let's take Kinchev's song *The Juice Squeezer* [*Sokovyzhimatel'*] - what's that? Everything in it is twisted the other way around. And all the good bands of today as well, each of them carry an element of punk.

#### TRACK 14

Let's take the band --- Monroe, you know it? Seva Chakurin's (band). That's punk, take the band PTVP, that is *Poslednye Tanki V Parizhe*, what's that? That's punk. Take... And simply even... I can say that everybody who tries to sing seriously here instantly slide into didactics. They begin to teach someone something and I don't record bands like that. It's held as an absolutely unnormal thing to credit a band for. So I think that your question is apparently

asked, seemingly, not from the right angle. I would have asked to what extent Russian rock [and] roll indulged in the spirit of punk and I would have answered: 'To 99%.'

[phone rings]

TRACK 15

Y: Well, thank you!

A.T.: ...It was this thing with George Martin, see? But on the other hand he is a formative figure to me. Such a respected one, you understand. And I always stuck to the word 'producer,' because that very word was always ambiguous.

[goes on about the term producer: realisateur, financier, sound-engineer and about George Martin. Then signs record]

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After the MD is turned off, Tropillo gives a short lecture on the Leningrad Rock Club (LRC) and the Soviet cultural bureaucracy. My scribbled notes captured the following keywords:

Kul'tura procveta. Lenin founded the system of Doma / Dvorca Kul'tury that were governed not by a central cultural ministry, but by the labour unions. This system would have been changed very early on, had it not been for the fact that Lenin himself created it. And the system worked very well. There were lots of people and lots of activities in the cultural sector. The LRC, too, was part of this system, part of the LMDST, and bands came to the LRC to have their songs sanctioned (litovka).

The LRC eventually died out because the system of Doma / Dvorca Kul'tury was abandoned. The cultural workers disappeared and with it the educational system for cultural workers.

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**Appendix.****Notes on the atmosphere and context of the interviews with Andrei Tropillo and Mikhail Feinshtein Vasil'ev at Antrop Studios.**

The interviews were conducted in a technical workshop below the new Antrop studio. In the same or connected buildings, the Leningrad offices of Melodiia formerly resided. A.T.: 'You can never get such eternal signs off the wall again,' referring to the roadside bronze sign. The three floors of the building Tropillo administers contain a CD factory, offices, workshops, studio.

Andrei Tropillo seems to be in his late 40s, early 50s. His beard has got a touch of grey, his hair is shoulder-length and kept in a pony-tail. He wears blue jeans and a flannel shirt. He is obviously the point around which the whole building and its employees are turning, yet his face is open and friendly, his smile always present and his laughter infectious.

I wait about 40 min. in the secretary's office before Tropillo appears. He runs to and fro and is constantly involved in 3-4 activities simultaneously. Very warm and welcoming he is, though, and the atmosphere is very relaxed and friendly all the way through the interview, even at the points where Tropillo obviously disagrees with the points of view presented in the questions. The room is full of electronic equipment and a technician is at work on a nearby computer most of the time. He sometimes adds a comment or two. The computers make a certain disturbance to the recording, a humming, and the loud interference from T's cellphone sometimes render the end of a sentence inaudible. The phone rings constantly, the secretary comes by and Tropillo leaves after a first 40-min session to attend a meeting. He promises to be back in 10-15 minutes but is gone for more than two hours. In the meantime I do my interview with Mikhail Feinshtein Vasil'ev (interview 6).

When A.T. eventually returns he is less of a hurry, though, and gives me a full 45 minutes additional time. Although he is visibly tired he obviously loves talking on the suggested subjects. He speaks fast. Sometimes furiously fast. He states addresses, details, full names, explains abbreviations, all at a breathtaking speed. It is almost impossible to break in with

questions and most of the time not necessary. He manages to squeeze in information of his work and plans for today as well as to speak of the Soviet era. He searches for the right words, often completing several half-sentences before deciding on a last one. This makes some of his sentences a bit incoherent, with many 'vot tak,' 'nu vot' and 'kak by'. He frequently interrupts himself to make additions. His voice is concentrated, but confident.

Being an enthusiast he loves speaking and especially about his own role. He rarely boasts openly, since his role as the midwife of Russian rock is not disputed, at least not in Petersburg. He sits most of the time with his arms rested on his knees, sometimes glances to the ceiling, frowns when searching for the right word. The interview is clearly his. I can merely suggest subjects.