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LATVIA IN 2015. and UKRAINE TODAY

PETE ANDERSEN, the pioneer of Rock-a-Billy Music in Europe and the former Soviet Union, is seen (BELOW) performing with the NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND, from a scene in the film FREE TO ROCK, which explores the story of how the power of rock music from the West contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

Thirty-five years earlier, Pete, who lived in Riga, Latvia, a former republic of the Soviet Union, first came in contact with the Dirt Band. Their unique story is a fascinating tale of the Cold War, the Power of Music to build social and cultural bridges between artists, and the Power of Music and those artists to Change Societies....even totalitarian societies.

This story also relates and connects us to the horrific situation that currently confronts the world in Ukraine. . . .

During the Cold War years of 1955 to 1991, the Kremlin prohibited rock music behind the Iron Curtain. It couldn't be performed or heard on records, radio or TV. They believed it was an alien propaganda created by the CIA to dismantle the Kremlin's control of the minds, hearts and activities of its youth. They erected 2,500 radio jamming stations around the perimeter of the Iron Curtain to prevent all propaganda and music from the West to reach their citizenry, who lived in subjugation by their totalitarian communist controlled government. In time, the Iron Curtain youth learned how to Gerry-Rig their radios so they could receive transmissions from the West in the middle of the night, as rock music would filter through the air waves despite the noise from the radio jammers. The youth at that time didn't understand English, and the sounds were unlike any they had ever heard. However, they would all later relate, "We didn't know what those sounds were, but we knew it was the `Sound of Freedom' being transmitted to us.

Pete Anderson was one of the first teenagers in the Soviet Union to hear rock music through the Gerry-rigged radios. Living in Riga, Latvia, on the Baltic Sea, he was located closer to Western Europe than other Soviet teens. He was hooked the first time he heard Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock." At the time, Pete was playing the piano and singing in the high school's jazz band. Though rock music was strictly forbidden, he put together a rock repertoire of his favorite rock songs that he planned to surprise his school's jazz band, at their next concert event in 1959. His repertoire included songs by Little Richard, Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, Ray

Charles, Ricky Nelson, Chuck Berry and Freddy Cannon. Between two songs of the school band leader's scheduled repertoire, Pete had planned to jump in with a fiery piano opening and raucous singing of Little Richard's "Long Tall Sally." The other band members started playing with him, and the kids in the audience went crazy and started dancing. Meanwhile, the school's officials and the band leader were outraged by the performance. Pete was kicked out of school the next day, and told that he would never be able to finish high school, go to college, or choose a career other than a manual labor. Pete was hardened in his resolve, and continued his Rock & Roll path and formed his first rock band, to play underground.

In 1966, Pete had formed a band, called it the Melody Makers, and surreptitiously rented out Riga's 2,000 seat Planetarium Theatre, which had previously been the city's Catholic Cathedral prior to the 1940 occupation of Latvia by the Soviet army. They let Riga's teens know of the concert via word-of-mouth. On the day the concert tickets went on sale, all 2,000 tickets were sold at the box office in one hour! The manager of the theatre immediately called the communist government's Ministry of Culture with news of this development, and that all the ticket buyers were anti-socialist looking teenagers. The concert was cancelled immediately by the government. Later that afternoon, after word-of-mouth had spread to the city's youth, Pete and his band showed up with acoustic guitars (instead of their hand-made electric guitars and amps) and started performing on the steps of the theatre, as thousands of teens filled out the park in front of them in protest, while carrying large signs "FREE THE GUITAR." The Soviet military arrived in their trucks, and arrested Pete and his musicians, along with many of the fans protesting.

This was the first mass protest of the Soviet government in history --for any reason. The reason here, which sent many teens to jail, was to Free the Electric Guitar!!!

Between 1959 and 1972, Pete was arrested twelve times by the KGB, exiled into the country-side of Riga, while the KGB threatened to kill his daughter if he ever sang again. In 1972, Pete snuck back into town when he heard there was an underground rock concert happening at the art school. He just wanted to hear some rock music. However, when the audience saw Pete standing along the wall in the hall they begged him to go on stage. With some reticence, he jumped up on the stage and performed two songs. Suddenly realizing he shouldn't have done it, he rushed out of the hall after his second song. The KGB was waiting for him outside. They beat him nearly to death. He fought for his life in the hospital for two weeks, while his wife was in the maternity ward, ready to give birth to their baby boy. The day after his son's birth, a doctor came to the mother's room, said he needed to take the baby for a test, and would soon bring him back. Pete and his wife never saw their baby again, or were ever given word as to what happened to him. . . .

Meanwhile, in the mid-1970s, as the Soviet Union and the USA attempted to go through periods of detente, Jimmy Carter's White House was trying to negotiate with the Kremlin to have an American rock band tour the Soviet Union. President Carter believed that rock music would pull the Soviet youth towards the West and away from communism. The Kremlin continually blocked all discussions of having a loud rock band like the Doobie Brothers come to the USSR. The White House then thought they might fool the Soviets into accepting the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band for the tour, by telling the Kremlin that they couldn't dismiss American folk music. The only album they gave the Kremlin to hear was the band's multi-platinum album, Will the Circle Be Unbroken, which they recorded in Nashville with 1940s and 50s country stars playing music from that era. The 1977 tour was confirmed and contracts were signed between the two governments and the band. The Dirt band played 24 concerts, and performed on National Soviet TV for 140 million people. What the Kremlin hadn't prepared for was the band arriving with PA speakers the size of apartments, along with large amplifiers for the electric guitars and bass. . . and the band playing 1950s Rock & Roll music in the second half of their set!. After their first concert in Tbilisi, Georgia, the word-of-mouth quickly spread across the country, and every concert on the tour was sold out well in advance.

When the Dirt Band reached Riga, Latvia, they sought out the outlawed Pete Andersen. After completing a maze of detours provided by Pete, they outsmarted the KGB who were trying to follow them. They finally reached Pete's home in the country. The home had no electricity or running water, but a lot of love. They spent several hours with him playing music, and then watched as he excitedly walked over to his map of

America on the wall, and pointed to the cities he would visit one day when coming to America. Pete all of a sudden looked dejected.....put his pointer down, and lamented, "But they will never let me leave. . . ". In the ensuing years, Pete and John McEuen of the Dirt Band managed to maintain a clandestine long-distance friendship by mailing letters to each other through secret drop boxes. The KGB intercepted about half of the letters, but half of them got through.

It would be another ten years before the Kremlin would allow another American rock band (Billy Joel) to tour in the USSR.

After Gorbachev's Glasnost reforms took hold, Pete Andersen was allowed to form a band in 1988, Pete Andersen & The Archives, and tour Poland and Scandinavia. The following year, they recorded their first album for the Russian state label, Melodiya - the only record label that Soviet artists could record for. It was a live album of Pete performing songs from the classic 1950s rock era. It was the first album released by Melodiya of a Soviet band singing only in English, and it sold more than one million records. He was then invited to England to participate in a 1950s Rock & Roll Festival in London, while also appearing and telling his story in the BBC documentary film, Sweet Mystery of Rock'n' Roll.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the newly independent Latvia honored Pete with his nation's highest civilian honors and his own Latvian postage stamp. Though Pete detested politics and never wanted to have anything to do with it, he had become a hero to all Latvians for standing up to the KGB and the Kremlin and defying their right to control him during the Soviet occupation of their country.

In 2005, the initial filming of FREE TO ROCK, began in Riga, Latvia, where Rock & Roll first entered the Soviet Union. Our very first interview subject was Pete Andersen. Once we learned Pete's story, we immediately understood how fearful the Kremlin had been of Rock & Roll during the Cold War, and how they believed it could cause their youth to rebel against the communist rule in their quest for liberation and freedom. Because of Pete, we were able to interview the President of Latvia and other high dignitaries. And, because of Pete, we were emboldened to start on our ten year adventure to prove that Rock music contributed to the collapse of communism and the Soviet Empire.

In 2012, Pete and his wife flew to Emporia, Kansas to perform with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, for the film FREE TO ROCK. It was their first re-connection since 1977. Their performance together was sizzling!

In 2015, three years after Putin's totalitarian regime invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, the Latvian government, in association with the Open Society Foundation and the U.S. Embassy in Riga, reached out to us with great concern, as Putin's totalitarian regime was amassing eighty-five thousand armed forces on Latvia's border with Russia. The Kremlin was threatening to re-occupy another former Soviet Republic. While we were in the middle of completing our final edits of the film in New York, our Latvian friends were pleading with us to bring the film to Latvia as soon as possible -- to have a highly publicized premiere in Latvia, at the Baltic's most prestigious theatre, the Splendid Palace in Riga. At the same time, they were also urging NATO to bring troops to their border with Russia. They believed with a big publicized premier of our film in Riga, the Kremlin would have second thoughts about invading Latvia.

In New York, we rushed to complete the film, and then rushed off to the airport to join our friends in Latvia. We arrived at the Riga airport on the same day that U.S. naval vessels arrived full of Marines and tanks -- bound for the Russian border.

Sadly during this period, Pete Andersen was suffering with 4th stage lung cancer and was bed ridden. He could barely walk, and couldn't lift his arm to play the guitar. However, with our arrival, he somehow summoned his life force to get out of bed, take a lot pain killers and come to the Splendid Palace. The film was introduced by Latvia's Minister of Culture - Dace Melbarde; Open Society's Director - Ieva Morica; and the U.S. Embassy's acting Ambassador - Sharon Hudson Dean. Pete participated in the reception, which included generals from many countries, and joined us for the panel discussion that followed the film, which included noted Latvian historians and government officials. Pete then gave an impassioned two hour concert with four encores. It would be his last performance before his passing from the cancer.

Today, as the war rages in the Ukraine, another star from FREE TO ROCK, Boris Grebenshikov, whom is considered the `Russian Dylan,' has stayed away from Russia in his opposition to the war. He's giving a charity concert next month at Riga's most prestigious concert hall, with all the proceeds going to aid refugees from Ukraine.

Meanwhile, FREE TO ROCK's co-producer Nick Binkley, who is also a recording artist, will be re-releasing next month, his 1990s East-West Peace anthem "Novi Mir" ("New World/Peace") recorded in a duet with Ukrainian/Russian pop-rock star Vyacheslav Malezhik.

We pray Russia's invasion of Ukraine ends, and peace will reign once again in Europe.

The FREE TO ROCK film DVD is available on Amazon Prime and at PSB Records

<https://www.psbrecordsinc.com/>

FREE TO ROCK web site: www.freetorockmovie.com

The "Novi Mir" song can be heard on all streaming services, seen on YouTube and on the PSB Web site for the album Let the Boy Jam <https://www.psbrecordsinc.com/.../nick.../let-the-boy-jam>