

Whenever people talk about punk, it's usually about London or New York and about legendary bands that played in venues like the Roxy or CBGB's, using borrowed instruments on a worn-out P.A. to show 100 or 200 people that they hadn't actually rehearsed that much yet. What happened immediately afterwards is often forgotten. For serious music journalists, often failed rock stars themselves, only those first months mattered, because afterwards these veterans of the 60s had a new trend to waste paper on and could once again look for a new idol feeding the illusion they were still in their youth.

Fortunately, the bands and their audiences were able to cheerfully ignore this and follow their own path. If they could not go to London, they could always create the feeling of being in London by putting something together themselves. City after city fell for the new virus and everywhere new bands were formed and small clubs emerged, which were usually closed down by the police after only a few months following a truckload of complaints from disgruntled local residents who couldn't reconcile spiky hair, leather jackets with slogans and piercings with a biorhythm based on fulltime pointless employment.

Of course, this did not work everywhere. There were places where any form of dissidence led to a session in the local torture chamber, from Chile to Indonesia and from Cambodia to Uganda, with a brief stop in almost any country of choice in the Middle East. The Second World War had officially ended a long time before this, but for many people that didn't make a big difference, as they were still living under a dictator who controlled every element of their lives. In Western Europe, the prime example of a place where people didn't want to live was the USSR, home to the KGB, empty shop shelves, the Gulag and a big pile of nuclear missiles.

This fixation on the Red Menace, a fictitious threat of war which, in retrospect, was primarily used to increase investment opportunities for US multinationals, was of course too tempting. It's never easy to find a name for a band that immediately strikes a chord with people. Years later, hundreds of metal and crust bands would simply pick something out of a compendium of diseases with repulsive symptoms, but in 1979, four young punks in Leuven (Belgium) opted for efficiency. By simply calling themselves The Sovjets, all good citizens would automatically be annoyed by them, as if they were dealing with a fifth column that tried to disturb the social structures from within.

Clearly influenced by British bands of the time, The Sovjets tried to find their own style and write their own songs. Even then, underground bands had a hard time finding gigs, especially since most establishments wanted to keep the punk audience out. Some establishments catered to neatly dressed gentlemen with gold chains around their necks who used the disco soundtrack to try their luck with girls who could have been their daughters. Others described themselves as working-class pubs, which usually referred to a clientele of alcoholics who regarded any new cultural trend as an invasion of the only territory left to them by their social status, a dilapidated shack with poorly maintained toilets where they could leave their unemployment benefits in exchange for the feeling of finally not having to spend a few hours in their mouldy house with a leaking roof.

Here and there, there were opportunities to play gigs, sometimes as a support act for a better-known name and sometimes in those lonely pubs that embraced the counterculture, such as Arno'z in Leuven. However, this did not stop the foursome from developing further musically. In 1982, first guitarist Jan left the band and new guitarist Leon took over. Because the world wasn't standing still, at that time the primitive punk of the first years evolved into what some called post-punk and the rest simply knew as new wave, a term that now, 40 years later, is still used by nostalgics who refuse to accept that it isn't all that new any more. The band changed their name to Sovjet War.

It wasn't just concerts that were difficult to find. For every TC Matic, Red Zebra or The Scabs, there were dozens of similar bands that never found a label, were never played on the radio and weren't

interviewed for a weekly magazine. The fact that Sovjet War was luckier than many was due to the fact that they lived in Leuven, a city which was then flooded with young musicians of all sorts, mainly former students who had nothing better to do and didn't want to return to their depressing native region.

One of the figures who took young bands under his wings was Ludo Camberlin, founder of the Anything But Records label. The band had already recorded a cassette called 'Bootleg' on their own and sold hundreds of copies at concerts, but Camberlin saw the bigger picture and put one of their songs 'The Nuthouse' on his compilation 'No Big Business 2', a record that was initially successful, was thrown at customers' heads for pennies in second-hand shops a few years later and is now a collector's item. In the same Cleo Studio 'Just a story' was recorded during the same sessions, a song that finally saw the light of day on the compilation 'Koude Golven' during the reissue craze of the beginning of the 21st century. In 1982, a second recording session resulted in the single 'It became a problem/Guns for fun' on the same Anything But label and two other then unreleased songs, which you'll now finally find on this LP.

Early in 1983, guitarist Leon left and the other three band members could no longer motivate themselves to continue. Musical disagreements are often mentioned, but it was just as much about the frustrating realisation that the general public kept choosing hit parade fodder made of unrecycled plastic that was built more on the PR campaigns of shrewd managers than on musical content. That year, Sovjet War went into a long hibernation, not thinking they would ever wake up.

That resuscitation took no less than 36 years, as it was only in 2019 that the bloodstream in the dead Sovjet War began to bubble up again. The first discussions about a possible restart mainly revolved around the question of whether everyone was prepared to give their all to the band. This should definitely not become a hobby club of people in their fifties who, for lack of anything else, wanted to use the rehearsal room to fill up their free Sunday afternoons. This had to become a band with form and content, with new songs, with relevant lyrics and with a live act that would convince more people than just those few friends who wouldn't dare to stay away. The three remaining original members, Bergy, Tirre and Zip, were joined by new guitarist Koen.

Exactly a century after the passage of the Spanish flu, the entire world unexpectedly fell prey to a new pandemic. On 14 March 2020, less than 24 hours before the third concert with the new line-up, Belgium went into lockdown and the music sector was pushed aside by the battle between the arguments of scientific research and the anger over cancelled holiday plans.

With no possibilities to play live, the band started to look for new songs. The result was a thoroughly reworked setlist, full of songs that were just waiting to be officially released. As soon as the live circuit was given some breathing space again in the autumn of 2021, concerts finally followed, among others in Leuven's music center Het Depot, which considers the support of local talent its mission. Inevitably, the public asked how and where they could get their hands on these songs. The time had come for a record, but this obviously requires some practical preparations and in that regard the help of a label is always convenient.

In the end, it became Tracks&Traces, a label founded by veteran Roland Beelen specifically for releases by artists, whatever that word means, who at the same time have solid roots in the past and enough creativity to produce new material in the present. The result is an overview of what Sovjet War is now on side A and of what The Soviets used to be on side B.

One sometimes hears people say that nobody knows what the future will bring. Forget that. Sovjet War will continue to exist, to perform and to release new songs until they drop. When that will be, nobody knows indeed, but chances are that they will survive you all.