DAVID-EMIL WICKSTRÖM

Marusia visits Berlin
Cultural flows surrounding the Russendisko

"Who are these guys from Svoboda? Are there more mp3s to listen to?"[1]

Preparing my field work in Berlin in August 2005 I had written to two emigrants from the former Soviet Union.[2] Living in Berlin and working as DJs, Yuriy Gurzhy and Wladimir Kaminer seemed interesting because they play a lot of music from St. Petersburg, where I had been doing research. Yuriy promptly answered positively and asked about *Svoboda*, a group I was involved in.[3] I told him I was the group's trumpet player and I would bring him a copy of *Svoboda's* Demo-CD in October 2005. He replied that he really liked the music. Then, during the next e-mail exchange he wrote: "We would be happy to have Svoboda's Demo, Marusia is currently our big favorite :) What is the band currently doing?"[4]

As it turned out *Marusia*[5] was being played at the *Russendisko*,[6] a fortnightly event which Yuriy and Wladimir dj. Once I got to Berlin I interviewed Yuriy and gave him the Demo-CD. When I visited the *Russendisko* on October 8th, 2005 they played (at least) two of the songs (*Marusia* and *Choboti*) and Yuriy said that they had also played another song (*Pagoda*) on their monthly radio show *Russendisko Club mit Wladimir Kaminer und Yuriy Gurzhy* on the station *Radiomultikulti*.[7]

---

1   E-mail from Yuriy Gurzhy 12.08.05. "*Wer sind diese Jungs von Svoboda? Gibts da mehr mp3s zu hören?*" I use the *Library of Congress'* transliteration system for the Russian characters. The only exceptions are either other transcription systems used in written correspondence by my research objects or official spelling of names and words in other languages than Russian (e.g. Wladimir Kaminer and Yuriy Gurzhy).

2   This article is a reworked and expanded version of a conference paper read at "The Local, the Regional, and the Global in the Emergence of Popular Music Cultures" (Copenhagen, October 25th, 2005).

3   I had not mentioned this in the correspondence. I suppose Yuriy had checked my home page and under "news"' seen the link to *Svoboda's* website.

4   E-mail from Yuriy Gurzhy 23.09.05. "*Auf Svobodas Demo würden wir uns freuen, Marusya ist zur Zeit unser großer Favorit :) Was macht die Band zur Zeit?*"

5   *Marusia*, recorded 2005, is one of the songs from SVOBODA's demo (*Svoboda Demo*, St. Petersburg 2005) then available on the group's website. It is based on a Ukranian folk song.

6   *Russendisko* in its normal meaning refers to a disco for emigrants from the Post-Soviet countries. Through the activities of Yuriy and Wladimir it has, however, become a synonym for their event and the music they play. See footnote 9 for a discussion of the term "Russian".

7   A monthly broadcast on every second Saturday. The playlist for October 8th 2005 lists the song as "Svoboda" by the group *Svoboda* released as a *Demo* (http://www.multikulti.de/_/beitrag_jsp/ key=beitrag_43858.html with a playlist search for October 8th 2005, accessed on 04.01.2007). They also have a podcast linked to their show which can be subscribed to at http://www.multikulti.de/rss. xml?beitrag_463914 (accessed on 04.01.2007).

Thus through coincidence *Svoboda* was incorporated into one of the current popular nightlife events in Berlin.[8] Run by Yuriy and Wladimir, the *Russendisko* plays music linked to the former Soviet Union. This includes both groups from the countries of the former Soviet Union (predominantly Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) as well as a Post-Soviet diaspora touching mainly Germany and USA.[9] The target group consists predominantly of Germans and tourists, not necessarily emigrants from the former Soviet Union. Thus it promotes music which normally would be confined within a diasporic community to a new audience group changing the music's *visibility*[10] outside of Russia from regional (within the diaspora and homeland) to transregional (between diaspora/homeland and new target group). This promotion is linked to a filtering of popular music based on personal taste. Another aspect this article will illuminate is the flow of popular music between the *Russendisko* / Berlin and St. Petersburg / Russia and the inherent asymmetric relations present. While the music is considered exotic for the *Russendisko* audience, offering new musics, the groups benefit from the visibility in order to promote their music and (hopefully) tour, thus being able to earn a living playing music. The underlying question is how cultural processes aid in opening music normally confined to a diasporic community to a broader audience and the dynamics present in those processes.

This article will first discuss the application of *scene-* and *arena*-theory to the *Russendisko*, before describing three groups from St. Petersburg played at the *Russendisko*. This leads to a discussion of the creation of a specific *Russendisko* style before the article focuses on flows to Berlin and the opening of the music outside the diaspora.

---

8   This incident touches on my agency both as a researcher conducting fieldwork as a participant observer as well as an active musician playing in two local bands in St. Petersburg. These roles raise several methodological questions which I discuss in more detail in my dissertation (forthcoming).

9   While Kaminer uses *Russian* as an umbrella for (Jewish) emmigrants from the former Soviet Union (Adrian WANNER, 'Wladimir Kaminer: A Russian Picaro Conquers Germany' in *The Russian Review* 64 [2005], p. 592) and *Russian* is often used to describe the music played at the *Russendisko* I use Post-Soviet diaspora because it is more accurate and reflects the current geopolitical realities of the region. The use of *Russian* is part of the discourse around Russian national identities which can be described as a continuum between two poles. One pole analyzes Russia as an empire since both Russia and the Soviet Union were (and still are) multi-ethnic entities with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic / Moscow as the dominant power. This approach both underlines a cultural unity in a shared language of the empire (Russian) and a common cultural heritage (e.g. literature and music). It also explains the Russian Federation's current attempt to guard its sphere of influence in *The Near Abroad* including the sovereign countries Ukraine and Belarus and break away regions like Chechnia and Abkhazia. The other pole of Russian national identity is based on a shared ethnic and cultural background. It traces its roots back to the "origin" of present-day Russia, the *Kievan Rus* and *Muscovite Russia*. Closely linked to this ethno-cultural approach is the Russian-Orthodox religion, which after the fall of the Soviet Union has experienced a mighty revitalization. An added twist is that the English term *Russian* is ambiguous, since it denotes both ethnic Russian (*russkii*) and citizens of the Russian Federation (*rossiskii*).

10   This use of *visibility* is based on Mark SLOBIN's use in *Subcultural Sounds – Micromusics of the West*, Hanover, London 1993, p. 17ff.

Framing the Russendisko

> The Russendisko is a sound-system, in other words a DJ-collective with two peo-
> ple – those being me and Wladimir. [...] We play music, which we like. [...] That
> is music from the former Republics of the Soviet Union. [The songs] are prima-
> rily sung in Russian, sometimes in Ukrainian or [...] Belorussian.[11]

At first glance it is easy to locate the *Russendisko*. During my fieldwork stint in Ber-
lin in October 2006 the event happened fortnightly and was located at the *Tanzwirt-
schaft Kaffee Burger*, a club in Berlin-Mitte. The interior, kept in the style of an East Ger-
man bar,[12] is a reminder that the club is situated in former East-Berlin. Catering to the
Post-Soviet or Russian flair, vodka is served and Soviet cartoons and movies are shown
muted on TVs above the dance floor. For the die-hard fans there are also music com-
pilations[13] and fashion accessories. In 2004 the DJs founded *Russendisko Records* and
in December 2006 Wladimir co-opened his own club, *Club Rodina*.[14] The event was
staged at both clubs until Wladimir left *Club Rodina* May 2007.

But is that all? Both *Kaffee Burger* and *Club Rodina* host other events. Neither is
the *Russendisko* phenomenon confined to these two clubs. How can it be conceptual-
ized? In the following the *Russendisko* as a phenomenon will be theorized within the
concepts of *scenes* and *arenas*. Through the dialectic of these theoretical models the
Russendisko phenomenon can be framed capturing both the fluid and fixed elements
present, to enable a better understanding of its inherent dynamics.

The concept of cultural *scenes* has been in use for the last decade to delimit ones re-
search objects while leaving the boundaries to a certain extent fluid. One of my aims is
to examine how particular musical practices such as the *Russendisko* work to produce a

---

11   Interview with Yuriy Gurzhy. Berlin, 05.10.05. Following ethnomusicological practice the interviews
      are transcribed verbatim not correcting grammatical or other errors. This is not done to put the in-
      terviewee in a bad light, but to accurately recount what has been said giving the reader a chance to
      verify my argument. *"Die Russendisko ist ein Soundsystem, also ein DJ-Kollektiv mit zwei Leuten – das
      sind ich und Wladimir. [...] Wir legen die Musik auf, die wir gut finden. [...] Das ist die Musik aus den
      ehemaligen Republiken der Sowjet Union. Es wird hauptsächlich auf russisch, mal auf ukrainisch gesungen
      oder [...] weissrussisch."*

12   http://www.kaffeeburger.de (accessed on 26.01.2007). Kaffee Burger has with minor interruptions
      and name changes been a pub/cafe since it was built in 1890. It has a long history of being a meet-
      ing place for "alternative" people. In the GDR-times it was a hang out both for the extreme left and
      for the East-German civil rights movement – an escape from the GDR within the GDR (Personal
      conversation with Christian Kaden. Berlin, 06.06.2007).

13   As of Februrary 2007 the the following compilations have been released: DIV, *Russendisko-Hits*,
      Trikont 2003; DIV, *Russensoul*, Trikont 2004; DIV, *Russendisko Hits 2*, Russendisko records 2004a;
      DIV, *Radio Russendisko*, Russendisko records 2005.

14   *Rodina* is Russian for *motherland*. Wladimir Kaminer, translates it to German as *Heimat* (*Home, Coun-
      try of birth, Country of origin*) (Wladimir KAMINER, *30.11.2006 – Gute Nachrichten von Kaminer*,
      http://www.rodina-club.de/?page=news, accessed on 02.01.2006). Kaminer's choice of wording is
      deliberately ambiguous since nationalism which *Heimat* indirectly alludes to still is a tricky subject
      in Post-Nazi Germany. See Ellen RUTTEN, 'Tanz um den roten Stern – Die Russendisko zwischen
      Ostalgie und SozArt' in *Osteuropa* 57/5 (2007), p. 109-124 for a detailed discussion of his (mis)use
      of German and further references.

sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music life.[15] Unlike the concepts *sub-* or *counterculture* which tend to create binary oppositions and strict boundaries, "*scenes* designates particular clusters of social and cultural activity without specifying the nature of the boundaries which circumscribe them".[16] The building of musical alliances and drawing of musical boundaries are negotiated through forms of communication which enable those processes.[17] The *Russendisko* is such an activity, providing a space for social communication between the participants, the DJs, musicians whose music is played and the organizers. It is important to chart the relations within the scene in order to uncover the social relations. In this case it shows that this network of actors is dynamic with shifting roles: e.g. Yuriy and Wladimir play double roles as DJs and organizers (Yuriy even a third role as a musician). The featured musicians also function as guest DJs – when I visited the *Russendisko* on July 22nd, 2006 Yuriy was aided by a member of the *Amsterdam Klezmer Band*. The boundaries are not only blurry regarding the roles of the actors within the scene, but also delimiting one scene from other scenes. Yuriy is involved in the band *Rot Front* which have some songs in Russian and which have been included on the *Russendisko* compilations.[18] The band also performs at *Kaffee Burger*. While the band's two leading figures, Yuriy and Simon Wahorn, apparently met in the Russendisko, Simon Wahorn is Hungarian and the band consists of both Germans and emigrant musicians from Hungary and the former Soviet Union. Linking *Rot Front* to emigrant music in Berlin (and thus touching another potential scene) Yuriy said that the group is a typical cross-over band from Berlin: "I would not necessarily call Rot Front a Russian band, because [...] it is a result of a unique Russian-Hungarian connection".[19] In other words *Rot Front* is situated on the boundary to the *Russendisko* (and also other) scene(s). Other bands' relationships are even more complex, and spann several scenes.

Originating as a geographical delimitation of musical practice (e.g. alternative rock) *scene* has been broadened to include genres of cultural production and loosely defined social activities.[20] This makes the concept of *scene* a useful tool in both examining popular music locally as well as a genre of cultural production, anchored locally originally, but sustained through transcultural flows to other localities. Returning to the *Russendisko* phenomenon, it is neither limited to the two DJs nor locally to Berlin. During my stint in Berlin I also participated in an event advertised as "Barbaric lounge with DJ Nata (Novosibirsk) (Propeller Barbie Dance: Ska, Ragga, Gypsie, Polka, Electro, Turbo, Folk and more from Russia)"[21] at *Mudd club*,[22] also located in Berlin-Mitte. Not only

---

15   Will STRAW, 'Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music' in *Cultural Studies* 5/3 (1991), p. 373.

16   Will STRAW, 'Cultural Scenes' in *Society and Leisure* 27/2 (2004), p. 412. Straw's emphasis.

17   Straw, 'Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change', p. 373.

18   Div, 'Russendisko-Hits'; Div, 'Russensoul'; Div, 'Radio Russendisko'.

19   Gurzhy (2005). *"Rot Front würde ich nicht als unbedingt russische Band bezeichnen, weil es [...] ein Ergebnis eines einzigartigen russisch-ungarischen Connections ist."*

20   Straw, 'Cultural Scenes', p. 412.

21   http://www.kulturportal-russland.de/ (accessed on 03.10.05). *"Barbarenlounge mit Dj Nata (Nowosibirsk) (Propeller Barbie Dance: Ska, Ragga, Gypsie, Polka, Electro, Turbo, Folk und mehr aus Russland)".*

22   *Mudd club* specializes in Eastern European (that includes the Balkans) and Russian music, hosting i.a. bands from Russia like *Markscheider Kunst* and *Iva Nova*.

did the resident DJs play music from the *Russendisko* compilations and Russian bands, they also played music from the Balkans such as the music of Goran Bregovic. Similar events have been appearing across Europe and Israel both through Wladimir and Yuriy's tours with the *Russendisko* concept and locals starting similar projects.[23]

Andy Bennett distinguishes between *local*, *translocal* and *virtual scenes*.[24] When discussing translocal scenes he stresses that the global flow of people strongly characterizes these scenes. This is also the case in this study, where the *Russendisko*-DJ's tour with their concept and where many different participants may facilitate the exchange of music including this article's author. This characteristic comes in addition to what Bennett[25] calls the global mobility of particular styles (*flows*) and the ability of scene members to communicate thanks to new communication technology (e-mail, chat-programs, internet forums, file-sharing services etc.) which also play an important role in the *Russendisko* scene. I will discuss the translocal flows in further detail below.

While Bennett's trichotomy is productive as an analytic tool, the levels overlap with each other, something that Straw accounts for in his definition: "*Scene* invites us to map the territory of the city in new ways while, at the same time, designating certain kinds of activity whose relationship to territory is not easily asserted."[26] This article focuses on the *Russendisko-scene* which is primarily based in Berlin (thus local). However, the DJ's both travel and host the *Russendisko* in other localities and *Russendisko* imitations have appeared making the scene translocal. Finally, the *Russendisko* is also virtual (podcasts, myspace-profile, radio show, website). Hence the *Russendisko-scene* is situated in a continuum between the local, translocal and virtual. Thus, even though the original event is located in Berlin there is a translocal musical community involved with this music which can be grasped through the *scene*-concept.

While the Russendisko scene is positioned in the above mentioned continuum there is (at least in this case) a center, the original event at *Kaffee Burger*. The farther away the analysis moves from that, the more fluid the boundaries get and the harder it gets to determine what is within and what is outside the scene. This especially applies to the examination of events inspired by, or similar to, the *Russendisko* and of bands involved in the *Russendisko*. While the boundaries are intentionally kept fluid to avoid strict categorizations, I would, in this article, like to concentrate on the original event at *Kaffee Burger*, thus some form of delimitation is needed. This can be done through Lundberg, Malm and Ronström's concept of *arenas* which they define as "those 'places of performance' where social and cultural difference can be made visible and manifest."[27] It can help frame important aspects and processes within scenes which are not

---

23 To mention some: Armin Siebert, one of the co-founders of *Eastblok Music*, the *Russophobie-Party-Kollektiv* in Nürnberg (http://www.russophobie.de/, accessed on 26.01.2007) and DJ Schum / Iura Kharlamov with the *Russenparty / Russendiskothek* in Halle (http://www.newchance.de/schum/index.php?menue=diskothek, accessed on 26.01.2007).

24 Andy BENNETT, 'Consolidating the music scenes perspective' in *Poetics* 32 (2004), p. 223.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

26 Straw, 'Cultural Scenes', p. 412, Straw's emphasis.

27 Dan LUNDBERG, Krister MALM and Owe RONSTRÖM, *Music Media Multiculture – Changing Music-scapes*, Svenskt visarkiv 2003, p. 53 – http://www.visarkiv.se/mmm/index.htm (accessed 16.10.2007).

too fluid, while maintaining the clusters of social and cultural activities. Incorporating material, political, and economic prerequisites for performances the model uses metaphors from performances and the physical structure of the concert stage in order to describe the processes and actors involved. This allows for a differentiated analysis of the activities.

Stage designates the performance area (e.g. *Kaffee Burger*) while *backstage* is where the performance is prepared (e.g. selection of which music to play). *Offstage* covers what is not in focus within the *arena* (e.g. musics outside the DJs criteria like "Pop" music or Soviet groups). However, music forms from the *offstage* can emerge if certain conditions in society change or if the form adopts to dominant norms.[28] This is the case with the *Russendisko* itself, where a strong Post-Soviet emigrant community in Berlin connected with Wladimir Kaminer's popularity as an author positively changed the conditions of acceptance for popular music linked to the former Soviet Union outside the emigrant communities. I will return to this later when discussing transcultural flows.

Russendisko and music

First, let us focus on the stage and the groups played at the *Russendisko*. The music played is selected geographically based on musicians from the former Soviet Republics, also if they live outside that geographic area. The emphasis on emigrant music was stressed by Yuriy. The music is selected by the two DJs who thus function as *gate keepers* both *backstage* (as *bouncers* selecting which groups to admit) and on the *stage*, deciding what is included on the stage and in playlists and what not. Yuriy was not too keen on defining the musical style:

> What is very important: [...] the music here is context free, so to say. [...] Our taste is... Well, it is about good or bad music and not the music currently played or not played on the radio. [...] We don't draw on charts or similar things or what [...] currently is in or not in or out.[29]

While the music has been moved from a Post-Soviet context, it is far from context free. Even though the listeners might not know the music they have certain expectations when going to an event advertised as *Russendisko* staged at *Kaffee Burger*. Within this context the music takes on a new meaning, which I will discuss later in this article.

Yuriy added that the best way to know what music they play was to look at who is included on the *Russendisko* compilations. Both the groups *Leningrad* and *Markscheider Kunst* are prominently featured. Together with the group *Svoboda*, currently not featured, they will in the following be examined in more detail. The fact that the three groups are from St. Petersburg is, within the context of the *Russendisko*, coinci-

---

28   *Ibid.*, p. 53ff.
29   Gurzhy (2005). *"Was sehr wichtig ist: [...] Hier ist [...] diese Musik so kontextfrei so zu sagen. [...] Unsren Geschmack ist... Also es geht um guter oder schlechte Musik und nicht die Musik, die im Moment im Radio gespielt wird oder nicht. [...] Wir nehmen keinen Bezug auf Hitparaden oder so, oder das, was [...] im Moment so in ist oder nicht in oder out."*

dental[30], even though Leningrad / St. Petersburg was a center of Soviet popular music.[31] When discussing the following groups I am inspired by Slobin's use of *visibility* which he defines as "the quality of being known to an audience".[32]

> I know a three letter word
> and that word grooves.
> The Hockey team from the Neva banks
> And the music which we play.
> S-K-A, Skaaaaa Let's go![33]

Currently a lot of groups in St. Petersburg (and Russia) are influenced by the musical style *ska* which enjoys transregional visibility. According to the music critic Andrei Burlaka[34], ska appeared in Russia with the *Beatles*' song *Obladi oblada*,[35] but the first band to play ska in Russia was the Leningrad band *Strannye Igry* which debuted in 1982. Ska was, however, not too popular in the 1980s and not incorporated by many bands. The style experienced a boost of popularity in the 1990s, when people started to travel and were more exposed to Western popular music. *Spitfire* was one of the first groups to play and make ska popular then.

Talking about how ska is recontextualized in St. Petersburg Andrei Burlaka added that nobody in Russia plays like the original ska artists.[36] The local groups play more specific Russian versions (like ska-punk). Andrei Ivanov, the vocalist in the St. Petersburg reggae group *Reggistan*, added that ska derived its popularity from punk, which was and still is popular. He explained that Russians like to drink and when they are drunk they like to move, jump (*skakat'*) and push/shove (*tolkat'*), which ska and punk encourage. He added that reggae which is related to ska is not so popular in Russia, because it is more profound, slower, and with a different energy. Andrei Burlaka noted that it is too cold to play "Southern music", like ska in Russia, and that this is why the groups play a mixture. Aleksandr Kasparov, one of the directors of the record label *Eastblok Music*, commented on the popularity of Ska:

30   They are taken as examples both because songs by *Leningrad* and *Markscheider Kunst* were played quite often when I visited the *Russendisko* and because my field work was centered in St. Petersburg and I thus know the work of the bands quite well.

31   The first Soviet Rock organization, the *Leningrad Rock Club* was located there and has been important in the development of Russian popular music, especially a genre known as *russkii rok*. Today the city is still an important node within Russian and Post-Soviet popular music attracting a lot of musicians trying their luck.

32   Slobin, 'Subcultural Sounds', p. 17.

33   'SKA' in LENINGRAD, *Dachniki*, Gala records 2000. *"Ia znaiu odno slovo iz triokh bukv, a v etom slove zalozhen gruv, Khokkeinaia komanda, s beregov nevy, I muzyka, kotoruiu igraem my. S – K – A, Skaaaaa. Davai!"*

34   This part on ska in Russia is based on short phone interviews with Andrei Ivanov (St. Petersburg, 16.03.06) and Andrei Burlaka (St. Petersburg, 17.03.06).

35   According to Walter EVERETT (*The Beatles as Musicians – Revolver through the Anthology*, New York, Oxford 1999, p. 188) the song is written in a "clipped-backbeat Jamaican ska style popularized [...] by Desmond Dekker and the Aces". *The Beatles* were a major influence in the development of popular music in Russia.

36   Burlaka did not specify if he was referring to Jamaican or British groups (or both).

"I think for the Russians that is a good rhythm, good music, and has to do with
the Russian rhythm, with Chastushka or with all others... It's not too foreign for
Russian ears this ska rhythm."[37]

While these comments show a certain degree of essentializations of Russia and Rus-
sianness, they also demonstrate how Russians place a claim on ska as having inherent
Russian elements. In other words, ska is not only a foreign import, but something that
can be traced to earlier Russian music genres and (essentialized) cultural traits. Impor-
tant in the context of this article is that ska (especially ska-punk) has been incorpo-
rated in Russian popular music and currently is popular in St. Petersburg / Russia (and
also in the Ukraine, where a lot of bands play within that style).

Giving his version of why ska was popular in Russia Yuriy said:

"Well, I think that it always has been like that in the pop-world, [...] there are
pioneers and copy-cats and once Leningrad was so big/famous [...] For a lot of
people it was a revelation, [...] a discovery, that such a musical direction existed
and at that time Shnurov [Leningrad's singer], I think, had been telling [people]
on his home-page about ska – what it is and such – and Spitfire as well, well the
band, that always [has played] ska, he also advertised for them. [...] I think that
a lot of people simply found out about ska through Leningrad and then the idea
to play just that, because it is currently well received."[38]

While both *Spitfire*[39] and *Leningrad* have been credited with the popularity of ska in
Russia, they are not the only bands who have been active (and influential) since the
1990s. Popular and visible Russian bands from the 1980s and 1990s like *Distemper*,
Markscheider Kunst and (to some extent) *Akvarium* (which was also influenced by
reggae) have also contributed to the awareness and spread of ska.

Originating in St. Petersburg *Leningrad* appeared in 1997 and is currently among
the most well-known groups in Russia having achieved national visibility. *Leningrad*
positions itself in relation to the average (male) Russian, who over-employ *mat* (Rus-
sian curse words) and Shnurov sings about sex, drugs, alcohol and everyday problems.
The group's songs also incorporate and mix influences from Russian and Soviet popu-
lar culture (e.g. the melody to the Soviet cartoon "Nu pogodi!" appears in the song *Nu
pogodi!*) as well as Western (e.g. *James Bond* in the song *007*).[40]

---

37   Interview with Alexander Kasparov & Armin Siebert. Berlin, 19.07.2006. *"Ich glaube, für die Russen,
      das ist eine guter Rhythmus, gute Musik, und hat etwas zu tun mit die Russische Rhythmus, mit Chastush-
      chka oder mit alle andere... Das ist nicht so fremd für die russische Ohre, diese Ska-Rhythmus."*
38   Gurzhy (2005). *"Na, ich glaube es ist halt in der Pop-welt immer so gewesen, [...] es gibt Pioniere und
      es gibt Nachmacher und sobald Leningrad so gross war [...] Für viele war das ´ne Offenbarung, [...] ´ne
      Entdeckung, dass es überhaupt so´ne Musikrichtung gibt und Shnurov damals hat auch glaub ich auf seine
      Webseite immer so von Ska erzählt, was das ist und so und Spitfire noch dazu, also die Band, die immer-
      schon immer Ska, so der hat auch für die damals heftig beworben. [...] [I]ch glaube, dass durch Leningrad
      sind viele Leute einfach auf Ska gekommen und dann auf die Idee, eben das zu spielen, weil es im Moment
      gut ankommt."*
39   The musicians from *Spitfire* have been a part of *Leningrad* since 2002.
40   Both Leningrad, 'Dachniki'.

The group was featured on the two first *Russendisko* compilations[41] and has toured Europe (mainly Germany) and the USA thus achieving transregional visibility.

Founded in 1992 and being the oldest of the three bands presented here, *Markscheider Kunst* are veterans of the St. Petersburg music community. Their style is influenced by musics from Central and Southern America (initially also African). A Russian Rock encyclopedia[42] describes the group as the most popular Russian *world music* band in Europe. Touching on their hard-to-locate style and different musical flows to Russia, Yuriy said

Markscheider Kunst as well, [...] the band [...] where you no longer can tell where they are from. [...] During their live concerts [in Germany] I have also experienced that people [audience] didn't know, well believed that the people [group] came from Latin America, [...] especially with the Afro-Russian singer.[43]

They have achieved transregional visibility being visible in Russia, USA and Europe, where they (especially in the German-speaking part) tour 3-4 times a year.

Picture 1: Svoboda's business card (received 2006).

Playing *Ukra-Ska-Pung*[44] (see picture 1) *Svoboda* has been active in St. Petersburg since 2003 giving concerts in clubs and a number of festivals. As the self-proclaimed style indicates, *Svoboda* markets itself as a ska-punk band, which uses Ukrainian elements to position itself as something different or even exotic. The St. Petersburg music critic Andrei Burlaka commented:

There as well so to say is a new topic – such ukro pop [...] Of course the Ukrainian language doesn't play such an important role there because, understandably,

---

41 Div, 'Russendisko-Hits'; Div, 'Russensoul'.

42 Aleksandr TROFIMOV (ed.), *Russkii rok entsiklopediia*, Moskva (A.T. Publishing) 2003, p. 439.

43 Gurzhy (2005). *"Markscheider Kunst auch, [...] die Band, [...] wo du jetzt nicht mehr sagen würdest, wo sie herkommt. [...] Ich habe auch bei ihren Livekonzerten [in Germany] erlebt, dass die Leuten nicht wussten, also glaubten, dass die Leuten irgendwie aus dem Lateinamerika kommen, [...] besonders mit dem Afro-russischen Sänger."*

44 When asked why *Pung* and not Punk the singer Aleksandr "Sasha" Rudenko replied that *Pung* sounds "cooler" (Personal conversation with Aleksandr Rudenko. St. Petersburg, 21.06.2006).

it's, well, cool. And so the music, so it really touches something there. There are similar playing [groups] from Piter there, yes, but [it] is [...] an added exotic, such a folkloric [one].[45]

The band does not draw on a specific local tradition, its exotic elements are based in clichés of Ukrainian folk music/lore. Two sources of inspiration for *Svoboda* are *Leningrad* and *Vopli Vidopliasova* (a band also featured at the *Russendisko*). *Vopli Vidopliasova* humorously draw on elements from Ukrainian folklore and sing in Ukrainian.

Unlike *Markscheider Kunst* and *Leningrad*, *Svoboda* have primarily been visible on a local level in Russia[46] as well as the *Russendisko*.

An interesting change occurs when *Leningrad*, *Markscheider Kunst* and *Svoboda* reach Berlin: their positioning used within the Russian market and thus the identity perceived by the listeners is lost or changes. Due to their geographical origin, the groups become labeled *Russian* as implied by the term *Russendisko* (even though not all groups are from the Russian Federation) and thus as *exotica from Russia* – for Berlin listeners.

While *Svoboda* already use their Ukrainian motives to promote themselves as exotic in St. Petersburg, the form of exotization changes into a Pan-Russian / -Slavic one in the *Russendisko*. This also applies to *Markscheider Kunst*, who shift from a perceived Latin-American-African identity to a Russian-Latin-American one. *Leningrad* are perceived as arch-Russian in Russia – as something the listeners there can identify with – and remain Russian. However they lose the specific Russian details and become exotically Russian based on origin rather than content. Thus listeners in Berlin who do not speak Russian or know Russia find other ways to identity with the groups since they can not identify with the groups based on shared (Russian) local experiences and references.

On a musical level, what combines these three groups is that they all have a horn section and are inspired by *ska*. Can a *style indicator* – defined as "any musical structure or set of musical structures that are either constant for or regarded as typical of the 'home' musical style"[47] – be identified for the music played at the *Russendisko*? Asked to elaborate his views on style Yuriy said:

Musically [...] I'm not too comfortable with musical styles. It's possible to say that it's somewhere between ska, reggae, folk and, don't know, Balkan. [...] Exactly in our cross-over times it's hard, because the band playing ska today, will play hip-hop tomorrow.[48]

45   Interview with Andrei Burlaka. St. Petersburg, 22.03.2005. "*Vot tozhe [...] novaia tak skazat' tema – takoi [...] ukro pop [...] Ukrainskii iazyk tam konechno ne igraet takoi vazhnoi roli potomu chto, poniatno, nu prikol. A tak muzyka tak ona dostatochno tam ukladyvaetsia v kakie-to. Est' piterskie pokhozhie igraiushchie tam da no [...] dopolnitel'naia ekzotika, takaia fol'klornaia.*"
46   *Svoboda* has played in Moscow and Lodeinoe Pole, however these gigs have been exceptions.
47   Philip TAGG, *Introductory notes to the Semiotics of Music*, Version 3, Liverpool/Brisbane 1999, p. 28 – http://tagg.org/xpdfs/semiotug.pdf (accessed on 23.02.2007).
48   Gurzhy (2005). "*Musikalisch [...] fühl ich mich nicht so wohl mit so Richtungsbezeichnung. Man könnte schon sagen dass es zwischen Ska, Reggae, Folk und, weiss ich nicht, Balkan ist. [...] Genau in unseren Cross-over-zeit ist es sehr schwierig, weil die Band, die heute Ska gespielt hat, wird morgen Hip-hop machen.*"

These style indicators fit within what Aleksandr Kasparov said when talking about *Russendisko* music: that the main style is ska-punk and rock, and that the music should be danceable. Armin Siebert, his business partner, added that they also play some Klezmer-inspired music, but that the music is mostly rock and pop, and neither electronic nor other music styles.[49]

An analysis of the rhythm section and horns of two songs featured at the Russendisko should give us some insight regarding the *style indicator*s. In *Svoboda's Marusia*[50] the horns (trumpet, trombone) accompany the vocalist during the refrain and play the melody twice as a solo (in the beginning and after the second verse) The guitar predominantly accents the two and the four, while the bass plays the chord roots in quarter notes. The bass drum hits the one and three while the snare accents the two and four.

In *Leningrad's* song *SKA*[51] the horns play a backing riff during the refrain and at the end take turns soloing (trumpet, trombone, tenor saxophone and tuba). The bass plays mainly arpeggiated triads in quarters notes while the guitar accents the offs of every beat playing chords. A keyboard continuously plays the root note on the one and chords based on that root on the two, three and four. The high hat doubles the guitar's accents on the off beats while the snare accents the two and four. The bass drum, which was hard for me to hear on the recording, seems to accent all the beats on the on-beat.

Musically striking in this analysis is the use of horns (*Svoboda*: trumpet, trombone; *Leningrad*: trumpet, trombone, tuba, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone), that play both melody and backings, as well as the guitar, which accents either the second and fourth beat in the measure or the off beats supported by either the snare (*Svoboda*) or high hat (*Leningrad*). This rhythmic accompaniment is also known from the styles reggae and ska.

These *style indicators* are present when listening to the compilations[52] and visiting the *Russendisko*. Elements from "folk" music from inter alia Ukraine, Russia and Moldavia as in *Marusia* are frequently incorporated (indicators include the use of minor modes and the style of harmony singing). Another striking element at the *Russendisko* is music that draws on Balkan music (use of horns, embellishing the melodies with e.g. trills). Finally, the use of Russian and related Slavic languages effect the timbre of the vocalists. The mentioned elements are the major *style indicators*.

However, this does not imply that the songs played belong to one homogenous style. The songs consist of an eclectic mix of different groups covering different (sub)styles (e.g. Rock, Ska-punk, Klezmer, Folk rock, *Blatniak*) yet not always with the mentioned style indicators. Although playing with a horn line up (trumpet, trombone, tenor saxophone) *Markscheider Kunst's* music is more influenced by mambo, salsa and other Latin American rhythms. Furthermore, the DJs incorporate German popular music with links to Russia such as the German group *Dschinghis Khan's*[53] *Moskau* and

49   Interview with Alexander Kasparov & Armin Siebert. Berlin, 11.10.2005.
50   Svoboda, 'Svoboda Demo'.
51   Leningrad, 'Dachniki'.
52   Div, 'Russendisko-Hits'; Div, 'Russensoul'; Div, 'Russendisko Hits 2'; Div, 'Radio Russendisko'.
53   DSCHINGHIS KAHN, *Dschinghis Khan*, BMG 1979.

Dschinghis Khan, whose style indicators place them within popular music from the 1970/80s. The songs played also depends on the DJ. When a member of the *Amsterdam Klezmer Band* guest-dj-ed, the *style indicators* of the music he used brought associations to Klezmer music (acoustic, minor scales, embellishments on the melodies) and Russian groups playing in the style of *Dobranotch*.[54] Other music not frequently played and not featured on the compilations but very present in Russia are groups which were popular during the Soviet times, such as *Akvarium*, *DDT* and *Alisa*. Some of these groups which are still active today occasionally tour Germany (*Akvarium*, *Auktsyon*, *NOM*). Music styles not played include what in Russia is referred to as *estrada* (e.g. Alla Pugachiova, Filip Kirkorov) and the slightly overlapping *popsa* (e.g. Zhanna Friske, *VIA Gra*[55], t.A.T.u.) which Yuriy refers to as pop.[56]

To sum up, through filtering processes (personal taste, disco-suitability) a certain style has emerged, which is linked to the *Russendisko*. The next section discusses how these groups and their music reach Germany and the cultural processes involved in this transition.

Music and (trans)cultural flows

Due to liberal immigration laws for inhabitants of German descent (*Spätaussiedler*) and Jews from the former Soviet Union, the Post-Soviet diaspora in Germany and Berlin has grown significantly since the reunification of Germany. 1,931,083 *Spätaussiedler*[57] (1991 to 2005)[58] and 197,110 Jews (1993 to 2005)[59] moved to Germany from the former Soviet Union, and became German citizens. In addition there were 185,931 Russian, 130,674 Ukrainian and 18,037 Belorussian citizens living in Germany in 2005.[60] Regarding Berlin, the urban studies scholar Giacomo Bottà[61] puts the number of Russian-speaking immigrants somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000 (taking illegal immigrants into consideration).

This influx of migrants provides a market for bands from the former Soviet Union to perform for, thus heightening the music's visibility. It is also one of the preconditions for the *Russendisko's* success. Another important factor is Wladimir Kaminer's

---

54   A group playing acoustic music inspired by Klezmer and Russian / Ukrainian folk music. They are not featured on the Russendisko compilations.

55   *VIA Gra* is a wordplay not only referring to the potency medicine but also to the *Vokal'no-Instrumental'nyi Ansambl'* (Vocal-instrumental Ensemble), a system for professional musical groups introduced in 1966 with the aim to control popular music performed in the Soviet Union.

56   Gurzhi (2005).

57   Citizens of the former Soviet Union with German roots.

58   The main emmigration occurred in the 1990s and peaked between 1993 and 1995. BUNDESAMT FÜR MIGRATION UND FLÜCHTLINGE, *Migration, Asyl und Integration in Zahlen*, 14. Auflage, 2006, p. 65.

59   *Ibid.*, p. 68.

60   To mention a few former republics of the Soviet Union. STATISTISCHES BUNDESAMT, *Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit – Ausländische Bevölkerung – Ergebnisse des Ausländerzentralregisters*, Wiesbaden 2006, p. 39.

61   Giacomo BOTTÀ, 'Interculturalism and New Russians in Berlin', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8/2 (2006), paragraph 5 – http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb06-2/botta06.html (accessed on 17.06.2007).

popularity as an author of emigrant literature. His successful debut *Russendisko* (2000) boosted the popularity of the event with the same name.[62] In his books which are originally written in German, he also touches on Post-Soviet popular music, thereby increasing its visibility outside the diaspora which in terms of the *arena*-model is going from *offstage* to *onstage*.

Berlin's role as a multicultural city should also be considered as a catalyst. Being open to events that bring people of different origins together facilitates cultural exchanges. *Karneval der Kulturen* and *Fête de la Musique* are probably the best known, but also the radio station *Radiomultikulti* and other events and institutions contribute to these exchanges. What cultural processes link the diaspora with the homeland and facilitate this cultural exchange?[63]

The concept of *cultural flow*[64] may be of use here. Ulf Hannerz[65] argues that *culture* should be studied through it: "the cultural flow consists of the externalizations of meaning which individuals produce through arrangements of overt forms, and the interpretations which individuals make of such displays".[66] It combines a cognitive and discursive approach to culture, while using a metaphor (flow) that emphasizes culture as a process. He goes on arguing that the study of *culture* through *cultural flow* should pay attention to the dimensions *ideas and modes of thought*, *forms of externalization* and *social distribution*.

One way in which meaning is externalized and distributed in society is through *media* that enables people to communicate with one another without being in each other's presence. This implies both a spatial separation in the production and consumption of forms of meaning as well as a temporal separation, since meaning can be stored (CDs, mp3 files) for later use. This separation is essential to the functioning of discotheques in general and in our case the *Russendisko* where the material is stored on CDs. The impact of media also implies a broadening of the concept of relationships (away from a face-to-face to a detached one) and contributes "greatly to making the boundaries of societies and cultures fuzzy".[67] This has also affected the work of the *Russendisko* DJs: They get their music mediated as CDs or mp3s from acquaintances who go to Russia, from personal contacts with musicians, and from the internet.

---

62 Gurzhy (2005); Kasparov, Siebert (2005).
63 Cultural exchanges have always been present and function through the encounter of different cultural forms. In the past these exchanges have primarily been mediated through humans, like musicians passing by or meetings at market places and other regional public-formed centers. The basic concept has not changed today, however the process has become faster, more complex and more mediated (sheet music, recordings), thus the human component is not always in the center.
64 Ulf HANNERZ uses *flow* in the singular when defining *cultural flow* in his book *Cultural Complexity – Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York 1992). In his working paper *Flows, boundaries and hybrids: keywords in transnational anthropology* (http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20 papers/hannerz.pdf, accessed on 22.01.2007) he uses both *flow* and *flows*. While my hunch is that he uses *flow* while defining the term and *flows* when applying it to empirical material, Hannerz does not explain his motivation for using singular or plural.
65 Hannerz, 'Cultural Complexity'. The following paragraph is based on the book's first chapter 'The Nature of Culture Today' (p. 1-39).
66 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
67 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Yuriy[68] added that it was not difficult to find music. Berlin has also developed to a popular place for Russian bands to perform, which has further facilitated the musical exchange.

Lundberg et al.[69] offer a model to look at transcultural flows of music based on *mediaization*. Arguing that music's form, use and function mostly is affected by *mediaization* they focus on the relationship between music and technology. Important in this context is their term *re-mediaization*,[70] where *de-mediated* music[71] is made available within local (musical / stylistic) conventions through a medium on a regional, national or transnational level.[72]

Even though cultural flows are to a great extent mediated through *media*, the human component also plays an important role, as demonstrated by my role as an involuntary manager for *Svoboda* mentioned above. Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues that "[w]hether it is ideas or substances that flow, or both, they have origins and destinations, and the flows are instigated by people."[73] To this he adds that "[t]he ideational and institutional framework of the flows may be 'placeless' or global in principle (the Internet is, and so [...] [is] the global salmon market), but their instantiation necessarily involves situated agents and delineated social contexts"[74] This is an important point, since even-though media is available, it first becomes accessible through human interaction (either face-to-face human contact, virtual chatting or surfing the net).

Thus, the musical flows are located on a continuum between human agency and media. This is valid for both *Russendisko* and for the record label *Eastblok music*, which will be considered later – besides using the internet (stronger focus on *media*) the actors travel to Russia (stronger focus on *human agency*) and rely on people who visit Russia to collect new material for their work (equal focus on both aspects).

These processes, however, are not limited to certain individuals, they are mass-phenomena, fueled both by the increasing travel of individuals (for leisure, studies and business) and migration due to economic or political reasons creating diasporic communities (like inhabitants of the ex-Soviet Union in Berlin). These movements heavily contribute to transcultural flows[75] and the formations of *translocal* and *virtual scenes*.

---

68   Gurzhy (2005).
69   Lundberg, Malm & Ronström, 'Music Media Multiculture', p. 68ff.
70   *Ibid.*
71   Mediated music that has been adopted locally and is performed in a local context.
72   An example for *de-* and *re-mediaization* within the framework of this article is the emergence of ska in Russia and its localization through bands like *Spitfire* and *Leningrad* (*de-mediaization*) and the subsequent recording and distribution of the music (*re-mediaization*) with its reemergence in the *Russendisko* in Berlin.
73   Thomas HYLLAND ERIKSEN, '1. Introduction', in Thomas HYLLAND ERIKSEN (ed.), *Globalization: Studies in Anthropology*, London 2003 – here I use the online version published at http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Globalisation.html (accesed on 18.01.2007).
74   *Ibid.*
75   *Ibid.* uses the term *transnational flows* while stating that it takes "central dimensions of modernity [...] for granted" (the artificial concept of a nation) instead of e.g. *translocal*. While *translocal* is a very precise term I in this context prefer *transcultural flows* since it shows the lineage back to Hannerz's use of *cultural flow* (Hannerz, 'Cultural Complexity').

These flows are still very asymmetrical,[76] but using a term coined by Thomas Friedman, the *playing field* is being leveled.[77] Friedman's point especially applies to *technology* and *media*. Technology in Russia that enables *re-mediaization* is becoming easier accessible and more affordable especially regarding home studios as well as computers with (pirated) sound studio software. Distributing the music is also made easier by the use of mp3 files and online music portals such as http://music.lib.ru[78] and online communities such as *youtube* and *myspace*.

The asymmetric aspects of the flows of music to and from Russia are, however, to the disadvantage of the emigrants. Most of the people I talked to in Berlin mentioned that neither emigrant music nor the *Russendisko* would be especially interesting for an audience in Russia. There have been some emigrant bands who performed in Russia (e.g. *Gogol Bordello* and *Red Elvises*), but such occurrences are rare. At the same time music from the Post-Soviet sphere is the link to the migrant's origin and thus more interesting within the diaspora.

The financial flows are also asymmetric. The emergence in the *Russendisko* and similar events is a chance for Russian groups to heighten their visibility, tour abroad, make their music known to a non-emigrant audience and, hopefully, earn more money than they could in Russia. *Markscheider Kunst* play more concerts in Germany than in Russia. A reason for this is the financial limitations in Russia – the country is big and it is too expensive to tour there without a sponsor.[79] Furthermore, there are no clubs in St. Petersburg, their home town, which fit their requirements. Either the clubs are too small or too big. Finally, their visibility and thus popularity outside of the centers St. Petersburg and Moscow, is limited. On the other hand, it is economically viable to rent a bus and tour Germany 2-4 times a year. This enables them to secure financial stability which they would not necessarily achieve as musicians in Russia due to financial and infrastructural limitations already mentioned.[80]

The possibility to tour, however, only exists for groups with the necessary financial means and contacts. *Svoboda*, for example, does not have these remedies. Recording and distributing music while earning money from the distribution is not very likely

---

76   E.g. traveling to Russia as a European is much easier than traveling to Europe as a Russian due to both financial and visa restrictions.

77   Thomas L. FRIEDMAN, *The World Is Flat – A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, New York 2005.

78   Accessed 27.02.2007.

79   Train travel is inexpensive, but traveling four days one way for a concert in Surgut (Siberia) like the group *Bro Sound* did in 2006 is not feasible for most of the bands. Even Prokhor Ivanov, the bass player in *Bro Sound* said after the tour that they would only play there again if the organizers covered the air fare. However, Prokhor added, that is too expensive for the organizers (Personal conversation with Prokhor Ivanov. St Petersburg, 29.06.2006).

80   Jocelyne GUILBAULT in her article 'World music' (in Simon FRITH et al. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, Cambridge 2001, p. 176-192) touches on similar issues when discussing transnational Caribbean musicians: They lead transnational lives and are internationally successful, which lead the inhabitants of their home society to believe that the musician's local needs are satisfied. This is not the case and thus the transnational way of life is reinforced, because the musicians cannot support themselves in their home country. Furthermore, she points out that "Caribbean superstars, as transnationals, are dependent upon Caribbean diasporic populations and organisations for their living" (p. 189).

either. In Russia recordings are used to promote bands, not necessarily to earn money (partially due to rampant pirating). Besides a heightened visibility at the *Russendisko* and similar events, the groups are not financially compensated from being played there (unless they are featured on one of the compilations). They do, however, benefit from some organizational help from the actors in Germany (organizing concerts, promotion), who also profit from the *Russendisko* as one of their income sources. The audience profits as well, since they are served new exotic music to which they otherwise would not necessarily have access.

Outside the Diaspora – Russian popular music as genre

As mentioned above, Berlin is a multiethnic city where cross cultural contacts are almost inevitable. Considered within that context, the *Russendisko's* success is not so surprising. This section will focus on the *Russendisko's* audience and how the instigated cultural flows might be creating a perceived genre of Russian popular music in Berlin.

When comparing the *Russendisko's* audience to audiences of other Post-Soviet diasporic projects such as the monthly radio show *Schum* (on *Radio Corax*, Halle), or the *Russian Rock Club of America*, some differences can be observed. *The Russian Rock Club of America* is "dedicated to promoting the rich musical heritage and culture of creative Russian-speaking youth in the USA and Canada",[81] thus seems[82] to target Russian emigrants living there. The booklet, as well as most of the songs on their compilation of Russian rock in America,[83] are in the Russian language and when I visited their *5th Festival of Russian Rock* in New York (04.11.2005), the audience seemed to consist of people linked to the Soviet/Post-Soviet space. Their website is primarily in the Russian language.[84] These preliminary observations overlap with a remark *Markscheider Kunst's* singer, Sergei "Efr" Efretenio, made about touring in the USA:

> For us it isn't interesting to go and play for emigrants. That is we of course would like to, in our calculations, function for a local audience. But now we went and played lets say within the line of the Russian Rock Club of America and everything was very, it was better than we expected.[85]

The monthly radio show *Schum* run by DJ Schum (a.k.a. Iura Kharlamov) is bilingual. The show presents mainly contemporary popular music from the Post-Soviet space

---

81   http://www.russianrock.net/newsite/englsih.shtml (accessed on 26.02.2007).
82   My research on the *Russian Rock Club of America* has been limited to visiting a festival they organized in New York, surfing their web site and listening to their compilation of Russian Rock in America (DIV, *Nashi! Pervyi Sbornik Russkogo Roka v Amerike*, The Russian Rock Club of America 2004). In order to verify this hypothesis more research has to be done.
83   Div, 'Nashi!'.
84   http://www.russianrock.net/ (accessed on 26.02.2007).
85   Interview with Sergei "Efr" Efretenio. St. Petersburg, 25. & 26.05.2005. *"Nam ne interesno ezdit' i igrat' skazhem dlia emigrantov. To est' my by khoteli konechno v raschiote na mestnuiu publiku funktsionirovat'. No seichas vot my s'ezdili i sygrali skazhem tak po linii russkogo rok-kluba v Amerike i [...] vsio byla ochen', eto bylo luchshe chem my ozhidali."*

and Germany (however a broader selection than the *Russendisko's*). DJ Schum and his varying co-hosts describe the groups played, where they come from, and explain some typical elements related to those groups. This combined with the bilinguality points toward a target group of both speakers of Russians and German not limited to Germany. According to DJ Schum and his co-moderators they have listeners in cities such as Murmansk.[86]

Wladimir and Yuriy, however, cater primarily to a non-emigrant audience. When asked if a lot of Russians[87] attend the events Yuriy replied that the Russians mainly remain among other Russians. One group of Russians frequent "Ghetto-discos" in e.g. Marzahn while another group visits clubs like *Mudd Club*. Yuriy added: "We started this mainly to present this music to other people, the Russians know what this is about."[88]

When asking different regulars about the *Russendisko* I was told that around 15-20% of the participants were Russians.[89] Furthermore, the *Russendisko* DJ's radio show and podcasts on *Radiomultikulti* are in German as is their CD *Radio Russendisko* which contains short stories intertwined with music packed as a radio show.

The record label *Eastblok Music's* directors, Armin Siebert and Alexander Kasparov mentioned four listening groups linked to the *Russendisko*:[90] People involved with Eastern Europe through studies, visits etc, a few Eastern Europeans, young people who, in Armin's words, are fed up with Anglo-American mass music and are looking for an individual alternative, and, finally, people between 30 and 50 who are looking for interesting new musics.

One way of promoting the music to a non-emigrant audience is through the intentionally humorous exotization of the event. Through parodying Soviet imagery on their posters, CDs and at the event (use of Soviet cartoons and movies, interior decoration) the organizers both stereotype and exoticize Russia and the Soviet Union. Alongside the search for new exotic musical styles this caters to a nostalgia[91] for, or romanticization of, an *exotic Other*, both in terms of Russia as an Other and a musical alternative. This has been supported by the omnivorous record category *world music*. In her article, Ellen Rutten[92] argues along these lines, demonstrating that the *Russen-*

---

86   Schum No. 44, 10.03.2005.

87   This was a slip on my side in the interview. I should have said emigrants.

88   Gurzhy (2005). *"Wir haben eigentlich das angefangen, weil wir wollten diese Musik den andere Leuten präsentieren, die Russen wissen worum es geht."*

89   Used as a synonym for people from the Post-Soviet area.

90   Kasparov, Siebert (2005).

91   There is an ongoing mini debate about the *Russendisko* being part of the broader *Ostalgie*-phenomenon, a nostalgia for the former GDR. While the Soviet Union and the GDR shared cultural references (cartoons, movies, art styles etc.) and the *Russendisko's* romanticizing of Soviet Propaganda imagery, the location and its interior opens for such an interpretation, the event clearly does not play on images from the GDR and a longing for that past. I agree with Giacomo Bottà who writes: "An insight into Kaminer's work shows its actual distance from this phenomenon [Ostalgie], which is bound to a post-reunification desire for *Heimat*, solidarity, and tradition. *Ostalgie* is not sufficient to explain Kaminer's efforts or the "Russian mania" as a whole, as its above-mentioned intercultural dimension is far from the idealisation of a German monocultural past." Bottà, 'Interculturalism and New Russians in Berlin', paragraph 7.

92   Rutten, 'Tanz um den roten Stern'. See also Wanner, 'Wladimir Kaminer'.

disko plays with German stereotypes of the "wild Russian", both on a textual as well as a symbolic level. It thus parodies the German clichés, not the organizers or the event themselves. An example of this "wild Russian" stereotype can be found in the song *Moskau* performed by the German group *Dschinghis Khan*,[93] a song frequently played at the *Russendisko*. The lyrics portray Russians as heavy vodka drinkers who throw their (empty) glass against the wall.[94] Through this conscious play on stereotypes the *Russendisko* targets primarily a non-emigrant audience: "The Russendisko does not appeal to a 'We'-feeling, but to stereotypical perceptions of 'them', 'the Russians', 'the Others', 'the Foreigners'."[95]

Another institution in Berlin with the goal to promote Eastern European music in Western Europe, and which primarily targets non-emigrants, is the record label *Eastblok Music*. Armin Siebert and Alexander Kasparov, both formerly employed at *EMI's* Eastern European division, founded the label in 2004. As of February 2007, the label has released eight recordings.[96] Since the *Russendisko* DJs also have their own record-label, *Russendisko Records*, I asked Armin if the market was big enough for two labels specializing in Russian and Eastern European music. He replied that there was enough music for both labels and added that the two labels focused on different kinds of music. *Eastblok music* does not only focus on music from the former Soviet Union, but on Eastern Europe in a broader sense.[97]

Through the *Russendisko's* focus on non-emigrant audience the participants are not necessarily exposed to other Russian popular musics. They are mainly acquainted with the music played at the *Russendisko*. As mentioned earlier, the DJs select music based on their taste which seem to encompass certain style indicators. During the interview with Armin and Alexander they said the music at the *Russendisko* contained typical Russian elements and referred to a specific Russian rhythm, melody, language, melancholy and passion.[98] Furthermore, when I asked about the traits of Russian music in Russia, Armin noted the following:

> "Yes, otherwise a lot of local coloring and that I think is something special in a
> worldwide comparison, I mean for me there is something very special Russian,
> just out of my feeling and if somebody could position that [on the market], just

93   Dschinghis Khan, 'Dschinghis Khan'.
94   This (German) cliché about Russian alcohol consumption persists to this day. In Rammstein's video-clip "Moskau – Sport Complex Olympiski, Live in Moscow" the band is seen toasting and then throwing the empty glasses against the wall (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMO8vYrTuqY, accessed on 19.06.2007).
95   Rutten, 'Tanz um den roten Stern', p. 119. *"Die Russendisko appelliert nicht an ein 'Wir'-Gefühl, sondern an stereotype Vorstellungen über 'sie', 'die Russen', 'die Anderen', 'die Fremden'."*
96   Four compilations: with Ukrainian popular music linked to the Orange revolution (DIV, *Ukraina – Songs of the Orange Revolution*, 2005), with electronic music from Russia and Ukraine (DIV, *café sputnik – electronic exotica from russia*, 2005) and two with music from the Balkans (DIV, *BalkanBeats Vol.1*, 2005; DIV, *BalkanBeats Vol.2*, 2006); albums with popular music by LENINGRAD (*Hleb*, 2006), HAYDAMAKY (*Ukraine Calling*, 2006) and LITTLE COW (*I'm in Love with Every Lady*, 2007) and an album with Russian table songs by PERESVET (*Oi Moroz, Moroz*, 2005).
97   Kasparov, Siebert (2005).
98   Kasparov, Siebert (2005).

like Latino music managed to accomplish in the last 20 year, then I see a chance
that Russian music will become a synonym for a certain sound and that would
be good, I mean if that is achieved."[99]

This is interesting, since they see a possibility to create a genre of Russian[100] popular
music based on the criteria mentioned earlier within the *Russendisko* context. These
elements are also reflected in two of the released albums.[101] However, elements of this
style can also to some extent be heard in the *BalkanBeats* compilations[102] and the re-
cently released album by the Hungarian group *Little Cow*.[103] Thus, the style indicators
mentioned by Armin and Alexander could signify a broader Eastern European genre.
Reducing the releases of *Eastblok Music* to music within these elements would however
simplify their CDs, since the compilations *Ukraina – Songs of the Orange Revolution*
(2005) and *café sputnik – electronic exotica from russia* (2005) touch other musical styles
and genres as well.

Conclusion

The *Russendisko* is part of a continuum of musical activities linked to a Post-Soviet
diasporic community. This article has described how cultural processes opened musics
previously linked to this diasporic community to a new target group. Using the *arena-
model*, I have shown how a selection of popular music from the former Soviet Union
has, through the *Russendisko*, gone from *offstage* music (outside the emigrant commu-
nity) to *onstage* music and become visible on a local level in Berlin. Due to both the
export of the *Russendisko* in Europe through its DJs, and to other events playing similar
music, it has become visible on a regional level. This is strengthened by bands from
the former Soviet Union that tour Germany. The music has attained a transregional
visibility and the concept of *scenes* has enabled us to include similar activities not nec-
essary limited to Berlin and musics from the Post-Soviet community.

The flows within this scene are, however, asymmetrical. Musically they tend to be
unidirectional, towards the West. Financially, the agents in Germany profit more than
most of the groups do, however the groups are aided in touring Germany both organi-
zationally and through raised visibility.

The Russian identity of the mentioned bands which was created to promote them-
selves in Russia is transformed into a Pan-Russian / -Slavic identity when recontex-
tualized. This is because the listeners associate the bands which were previously un-
known (thus invisible) to them with the *Russendisko*. Through the DJs selecting the

99   Kasparov, Siebert (2005). *"Ja, ansonsten viel Eigenkolorit und das find ich ist was Besonderes im welt-
     weiten Vergleich, also es gibt was ganz eigen Russisches für mich so vom Gefühl her und wenn man das ent-
     sprechend halt positionieren kann, so wie auch Latinomusik das in letzten 20 Jahren geschafft hat, dann sehe
     ich ´ne Chance, dass da russische Musik quasi auch ein Synonym wird für´n bestimmten Klang und das wär
     gut, also wenn man das hinbekommt."*
100 In this case actually Post-Soviet.
101 Haydamak, 'Ukraine Calling'; Leningrad, 'Hleb'.
102 Div, 'BalkanBeats Vol.1'; Div, 'BalkanBeats Vol.2'.
103 Little Cow, 'I'm in Love with Every Lady'.

music based on their personal taste the perception of popular music from the Post-Soviet area is also influenced. Arguing that they create a new style might, however, be too pretentious, especially when comparing the music at the *Russendisko* and *Eastblok Music* with the music promoted by other actors within the diaspora from the former Soviet Union.

This article unveils part of an intricate network of former Soviet citizens, living and making music in the diaspora. This diaspora enables the flow of Russian-language music abroad, since they make up a major portion of the initial audience at concerts. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the music automatically is promoted outside the diasporic community. In the *Russendisko* case demographics, coincidences and searches for musical alternatives are important in promoting the music outside the emigrant community.

While these and similar cultural processes might seem novel and even frightening, they are just part of an ever-existing cultural exchange which has expanded from a primary local phenomenon to a regional and to a transnational one. Not only are the impulses coming from further away, also the speed of the exchanges has increased due to new media like the internet, migration and accessible travel. The fact that all current cultures have developed through cultural exchange is, however, often forgotten in debates around assimilation and defending a country's highly constructed national "values" against "foreign" influences. The *Russendisko* is a good example of how assimilation works by locals meeting the emigrants half way so that both sides can profit from the cultural exchange:

> "We were also the first place in Berlin [...] where the Russians and Germans communicated with each other in a relaxed way. [...] I am still proud that quite a lot of Russian-German couples found each other there [at the Russendisko]."[104]

---

104 Gurzhy (2005). *"Wir waren auch der erste Ort in Berlin [...] wo die Russen und Deutschen locker miteinander [...] kommuniziert haben. [...] Ich bin immer noch stolz darauf, dass es ziemlich viele russisch-deutschen Pärchen da den Weg zueinander gefunden haben."*