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ABOUT US



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My name is Arturas Gomazkovas and I am a Media and Communications student at the University of Greenwich in London. When choosing the topic for the research project I wanted to do something that was very important to me, and that was music. I found a partner and we developed our idea. As we were both from an Eastern European background it only seemed right to compare music scenes in the UK and former USSR countries.

I have played the role of a Web Designer and Developer throughout this project.

I am Egle Jakaite, Media and Communication student at the University of Greenwich in London, UK. I had quite a clear vision of what I wanted to do with this project and I was lucky enough to find a suitable partner for this. We hoped to spread knowledge about the horrors and crime against humanity that were being executed in the USSR from our parents and grandparent generation. While researching this we noticed that not many people had compared the music industry in the UK and USSR. We chose to focus on this unique area. During this project I was responsible for design solutions.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

"People are influenced by many different types of arts, which inspire and spiritually develop them. One of the strongest influences is music, its rhythm and harmony penetrate deeply into the soul, giving the human soul elegance and charm." (Von Faust, 2014)

There are many studies on how music could be used as a healing tool for people with disabilities as well as a tool for connecting and bringing people together.

Nowadays it is hard to imagine a person who does not have a pair of headphones with them at all times and listening to an abundance of music stored on their devices.

It seems inconceivable that people's music choices could be strictly controlled and monitored by the state apparatus.

In the Soviet Union's countries people were restricted to the type of music they were allowed to listen to. They were forbidden to share tunes with their peers or other music enthusiasts.

Music became a symbol of freedom and tool of expression for citizens. The idea that music could unite, bring people together and heal was suppressed by the state, worried that they would lose control of their citizens. However, people were willing to pay a high price, and risk everything they had, in order to regain that freedom.

People who have never experienced the consequences of such strict repression on simple choices such as music have never considered the differences between these musical scenes. This project aims to shine a light on this relatively unknown and unexplored area.

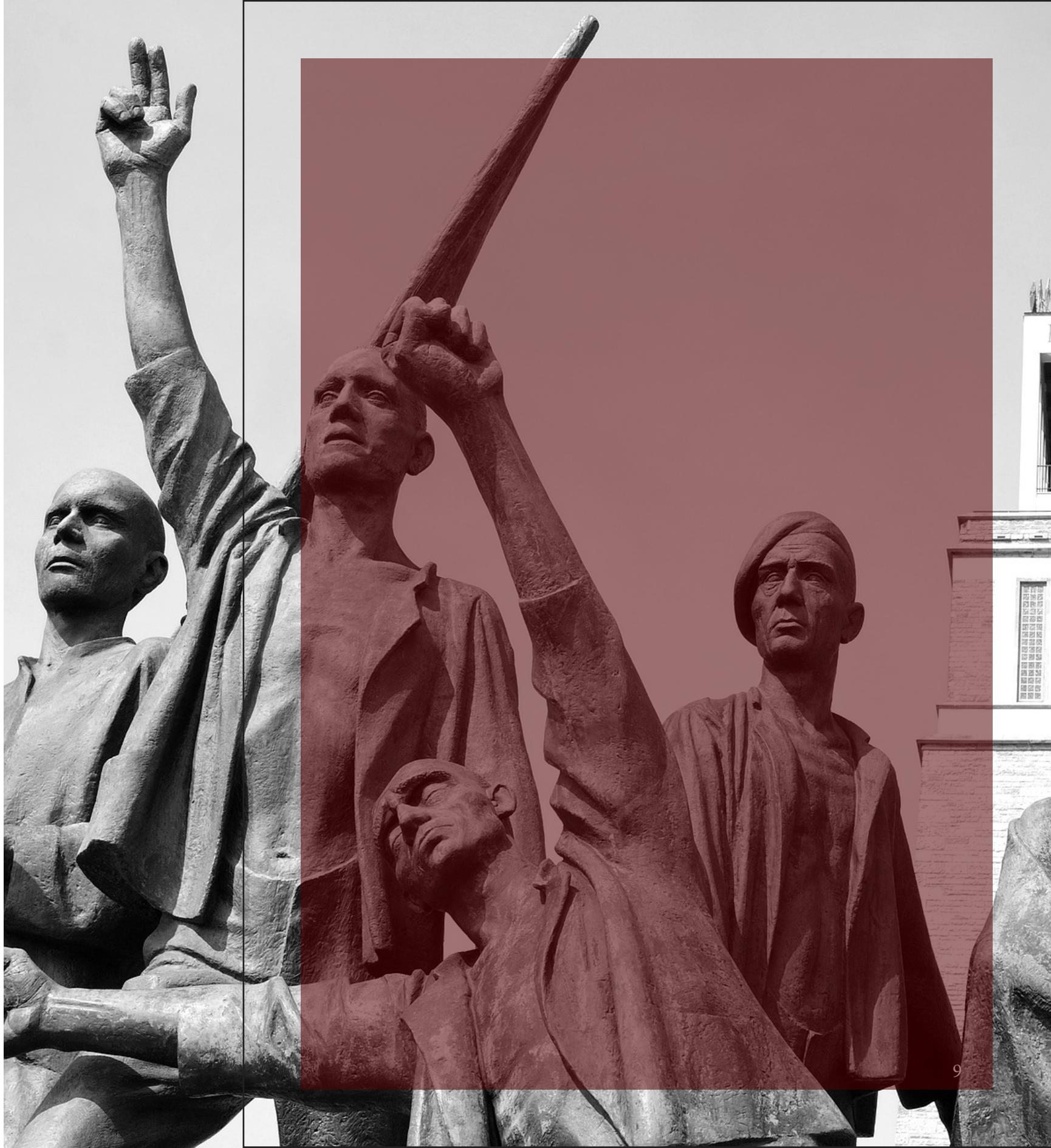
USSR

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The USSR had a long and convoluted history which started with an October revolution in 1917 when Bolsheviks took over the power from Bourgeoisie and ended in Dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Those were very hard times that went on for almost 80 years. Some people remember parts of that time fondly, although many dread the thought of life during Soviet rule.

The USSR was under the strict rule of the state, where people's freedom of choice and speech was very limited. Media was censored, everything foreign was considered inappropriate.

The USSR's state apparatus responsible for the censorship would closely examine each and every single thing coming from abroad and needless to say that most of the songs would be banned due to a number of alleged forbidden topics such as violence, vandalism and perversion.





UNITED KINGDOM

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Although the Allies won World War II, the country, like the rest of the world, was bruised economically and socially.

Due to the war, the UK country was in debt. People, tired of horrors of war, were recovering and wanted to live free and tranquil lives.

Human rights, like the democratic freedom, were applied and Winston Churchill, loved by the country, was elected to rule. Freedom of speech and freedom of expression were just about to flourish and people of the United Kingdom couldn't wait to use it.

In the following decades the UK became one of the largest hotspot of music, and legendary bands that are influential to this day were born.

The Hippie and punk movements would emerge, letting people express themselves like never before.

TIMELINE

USSR

1950s

As Soviet Russia was desperately trying to recover after World War II the situation in the country changed. With the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, Nikita Krushchev took over the rule of the state

1960s

A certain amount of leniency allowed Soviet media to cover Western music, even though the tone was hostile.

1970s

The signing of the Helsinki Accord in 1975 was a diplomatic agreement, the purpose of which was to improve relationships between the Communist East and the capitalist West. This allowed for the exploration of each other's cultures.

1980s

Music festival "Moscow Music Peace Festival" takes place in Moscow, 1989

POST WAR USSR

As Soviet Russia was desperately trying to recover after World War II the situation in the country changed. With the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev took over the rule of the state. With this change, some leniencies came in terms of censorship and freedom of speech. This period is commonly referred to as Khrushchev Thaw.

Composers gained access to previously unavailable music and resources, they were able to experience freedom of expression. This led to two groups emerging. One would create music that was nourished by the state and was supported by the Composers' Union whilst another group would delve into more alternative, underground, unofficial music.

Many people believe that a Sixth World Youth Festival that took place in July 1957 in Moscow was a starting point of the diffusion of Western music and culture amongst Soviet youth. The Soviet government was terrified by the explosion of western culture in popularity and they started banning it. It was deemed immoral and Soviet press was actively involved in the anti-Western campaign.

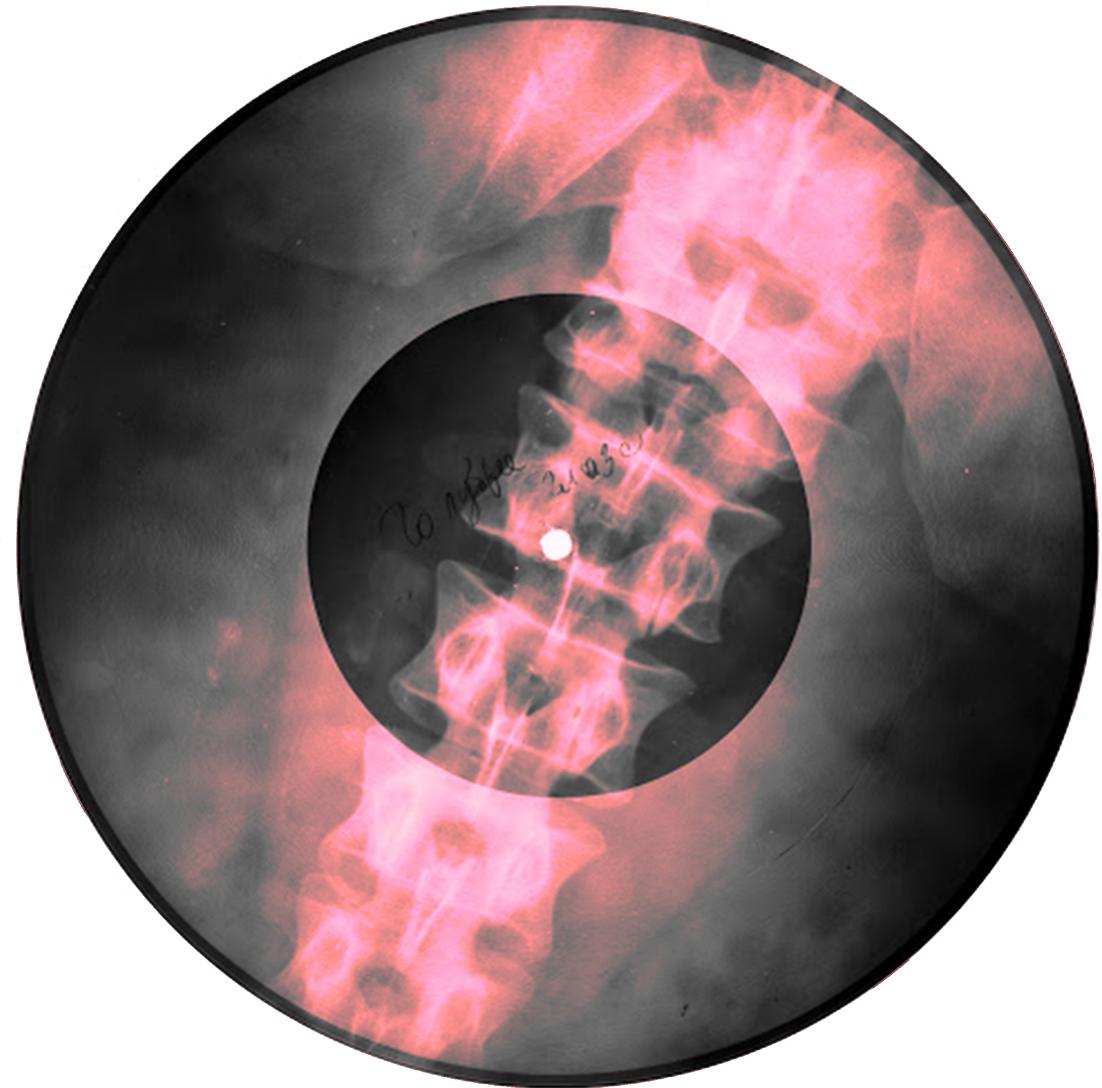
The state had an iron grip on the record industry and it was impossible to get Western records, which have already sparked a demand. People had to get creative.



MUSIC ON BONES

In 1946 a Polish man named Stanislaw Philo came to Leningrad and brought a trophy from war – a recording machine, which looked like a reverse gramophone. It would cut the grooves on the vinyl thus recording whichever sound was fed into it. He has opened a store where people could record their voice for fun. By night the store would turn into a bootleg music shop.

Music lover and X-ray record discoverer Ruslan Bogoslowski got very interested and would have managed to create a second recording machine. But there was an issue. No-one could buy vinyl in the USSR to record on to. There was a creative fix for that problem when Ruslan and his friend Boris Taigin started taking old x-ray photographs from hospitals, cutting them into circles and recording music onto them. However the underground recording studio was discovered and everybody involved in the business was arrested.



Piotr Leschenko, 'Black Eyes', 1950s

COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA

“Despite the earnest efforts of the Communist propagandists to dissuade Soviet youth from the interest in foreign rock music, these countermeasures had precisely the opposite effect. The young fans of underground music would find ways to get around the inaccessibility of photocopy technology to ordinary citizens by finding alternative ways of information circulation. Whenever an article featured a photograph of the group, said photographs would be widely duplicated by means of photographing the printed image, with the resulting faux simile black and white photos subsequently sold for a ruble each in school hallways and collectors swap meets.”

Von Faust

In the early 1960s, the Soviet press ridiculed The Beatles, saying that they were superficial idols and they were soon to cease to exist. A certain amount of leniency allowed Soviet media to cover Western music, even though the tone was hostile.

The demand for the coverage of foreign music became enormous. Youth magazines were writing about foreign groups, translating their songs. As the State was monitoring everything, those texts were anti-Western, but even such coverage would still give some information about foreign music.

Because of the virtual inaccessibility of original sources, writers would commonly misinterpret lyrics on purpose, thus trying to portray Western music as an anti-State plot.



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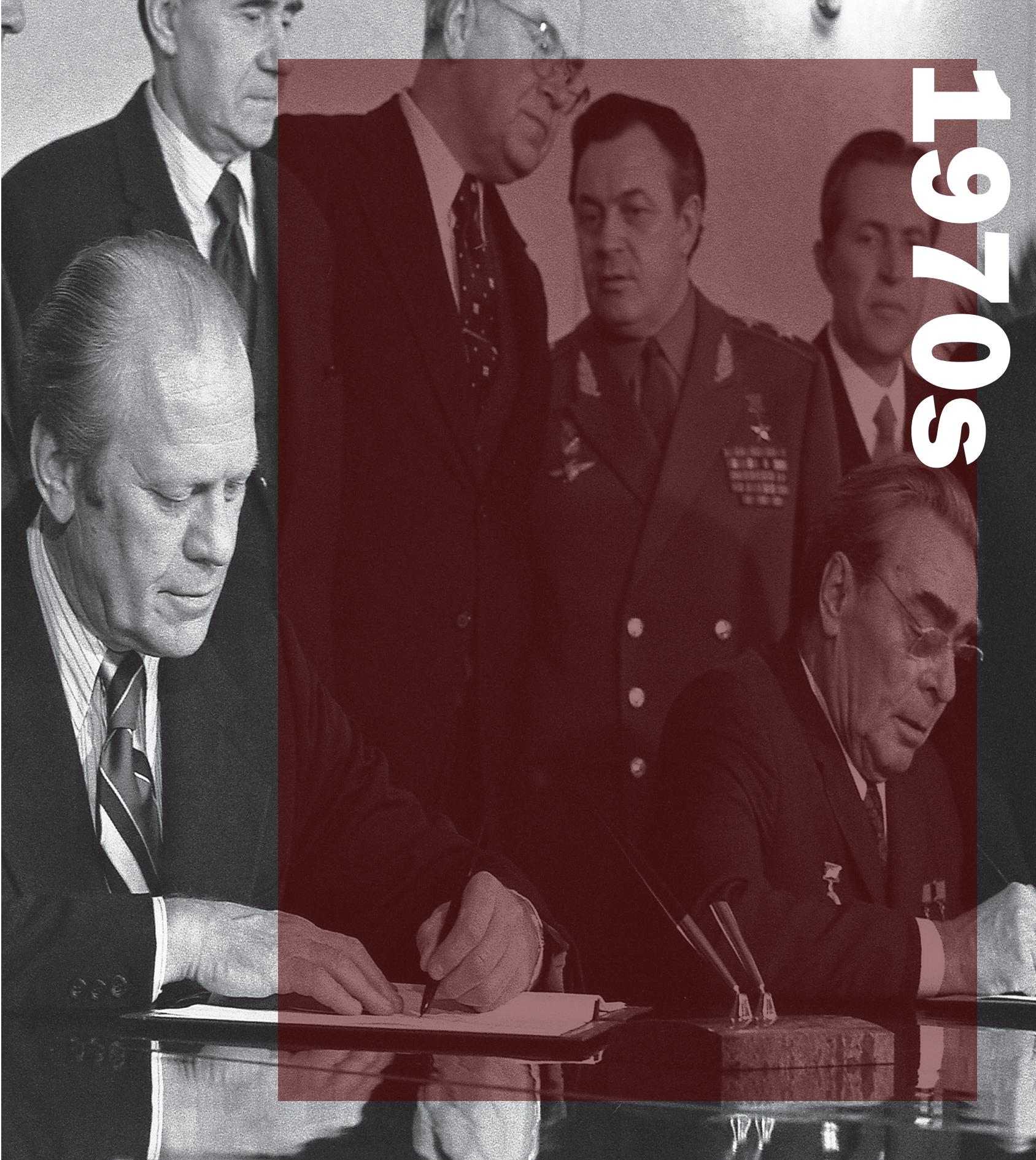
HELSINKI ACCORD

The signing of the Helsinki Accord in 1975 was a diplomatic agreement, the purpose of which was to improve relationships between the Communist East and the capitalist West. This allowed for the exploration of each other's cultures.

During the late 70s the only Soviet music recording label Melodia secured a certain number of licenses and released state-approved records of Western musicians, thus officially bringing western music into the country. But the state music industry failed to meet the demand of local music fans and the extensive network of black-market records emerged.

People would gather in remote areas or fields and passionately discuss music and exchange records. The location would constantly change, but it didn't stop the police from constantly raiding those gathering and punishing those who were caught.

US President Gerald Ford and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signing Helsinki Accord, 1975



THE BEGINNING OF THE END

In the early 1980s, Konstantin Chernenko ascended as the ideological head of the Soviet government. He was convinced that "through rock, the enemy is trying to exploit youthful psychology". He launched an enormous assault against the Soviet youth's counterculture in July 1983. In his speech, he said that Western music is poisoning the minds of Soviet people. He accused media in failing to combat new temptations of the youth scene. He ordered police to be going out and patrolling the discotheques and concerts in order to control the type of music being played.

The attack against Western culture in media continued. In the absence of independent media, people have turned to samizdat – unsanctioned and illegal writing made to combat the ideas against Western culture imposed by the state. Despite the fact that the production of such fanzines took a long time and it was hard to distribute them, the demand was huge. Vast underground networks of distribution for samizdat were created very quickly by enthusiasts.

*Velvet revolution
Prague, 1989*



INAPPROPRIATE ONES

Ban Lists became another consequence of Chernenko's doctrine. Lists of foreign bands were made listing the reasons why they are inappropriate. Even though they were made for internal use only, they have managed to reach the public and the police were using them as a guide and were punishing those possessing records by named artists. That led to a spree of arrests where people punished disproportionately harsh. Some were imprisoned for years, others were admitted to mental hospitals where they were administered the same drugs as patients suffering from schizophrenia. Despite all of the above Soviet youth continued to enjoy forbidden music and culture. They refused to surrender.

APPROVED COPY		Approximate list of foreign music groups and artists whose repertoires contain ideologically harmful compositions	
Group Name	Type of Propaganda		
1. Sex Pistols	punk, violence		
2. B-52s	punk, violence		
3. Madness	punk, violence		
4. Clash	punk, violence		
5. Stranglers	punk, violence		
6. Kiss	neofascism, punk, violence		
7. Crocus	violence, cult of strong personality		
8. Styx	violence, vandalism		
9. Iron Maiden	violence, religious obscurantism		
10. Judas Priest	anticommunism, racism		
11. AC/DC	neofascism, violence		
12. Sparks	neofascism, racism		
13. Black Sabbath	violence, religious obscurantism	23. Originals	sex
14. Alice Cooper	violence, vandalism	24. Donna Summer	eroticism
15. Nazareth	violence, religious mysticism	25. Tina Turner	sex
16. Scorpions	violence	26. Junior English (reggae)	sex
17. Gengis Khan	anticommunism, nationalism	27. Canned Heat	homosexuality
18. UFO	violence	28. Munich Machine	eroticism
19. Pink Floyd (1983)	distortion of Soviet foreign policy ("Soviet aggression in Afghanistan")	29. Ramones	punk
20. Talking Heads	myth of the Soviet military threat	30. Van Halen	anti-Soviet
21. Perron	eroticism	31. Julio Iglesias	propaganda
22. Bohannon	eroticism	32. Yazoo	neofascism
		33. Depeche Mode	punk, violence
		34. Village People	punk, violence
		35. Ten CC (10 cc)	violence
		36. Stooges	neofascism
		37. Boys	violence
		38. Blondie	punk, violence
"APPROVED BY" Head of the General Department of the Obkom of Komsomol E. Priazhinskaia			

FIGURE 6.3. The Approximate List. Author's translation of figure 6.2.

List of banned artists in USSR,
1985

WIND OF CHANGE

Konstantin Chernenko died in 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the party in the same year. He has introduced a new political direction which started with the relaxation of censorship. Editorial staff finally received the freedom of speech. Even though changes were being made, the prosecution of overly open writers continued for several years onwards.

Towards the end of the decade, rock music was steadily entering Soviet culture. Media has dramatically increased the coverage of the Western music scene to meet the rising demand.

Soviet people knew that things were moving in the right direction, when in December 1987 Uriah Heep, British hard rock veterans, became the first-ever hard rock band to perform in the USSR.

But perhaps the biggest approval of Western music was a festival "Moscow Music Peace Festival" which took place in Moscow in 1989.



Moscow Music Peace Festival poster, 1989

TIMELINE

UNITED KINGDOM

1950s

The UK in the 50s was so much different than it is today. Mourning society was strongly influenced by war culture

1960s

Transformation in the UK, especially in London, was fast. The generation who spent their youth in war, wanted their children to live their lives and enjoy their youth, meaning the post-war generation would be very different from the one before.

1964

On 9th of February, 1964
The Beatles starts first
British Invasion

1970s

The Punk movement emerged in the United Kingdom and became a trend in the early 70s. Punk as a subculture began as a movement against the music, style and idealism of the hippie movement.

POST WAR UNITED KINGDOM

The UK in the 50s was so much different than it is today. Mourning society was strongly influenced by war since a few generations of men were taking roles in World War I and II. The United Kingdom had to stand up on their feet again to recover in every possible way; economically and culturally. After years of war, demand for something new and fresh grew. People needed to be entertained in order to recover.

In 1953, everyone's attention was drawn to the new, young queen Queen Elizabeth II. Although newspapers and radio were the main sources of news spread, TV sets found a way to almost every Briton home, since her majesty's coronation was televised for the very first time in British monarchies history.

National broadcaster, the BBC, started releasing different forms of entertainment, such as comedies and dramas - The Goon Show, Under Milk Wood and Dick Barton Special Agent.

Although Britain as a country and empire was multicultural, foreign music was only accessible via foreign radio, like Radio Luxembourg.

Little did they know then, UK acts became iconic all over the whole world and influenced many different artists today.

Queen Elizabeth II during on her Coronation day, 1953
©Cecil Beaton



Swinging 60s

Transformation in the UK, especially in London, was fast. The generation who spent their youth in war, wanted their children to live their lives and enjoy their youth, meaning the post-war generation would be very different from the one before.

Music took a huge role in social and cultural lives, young people started fighting for their identity, causing the growth of creativity and the emergence of new bands like The Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Animals and many others.

Young people were experimenting with their wardrobe, ideas, political opinions and drugs. Recreational drug use played a huge part of the 60s music scene in Britain. Many artists discovered different kinds of creativity under the influence of drugs, like LSD. Hit records from The Beatles, like Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds, Strawberry Fields Forever, Across The Universe and many more created controversies and were the start of a rock music style called psychedelic rock.

The early examples of this style of rock and roll are The Beatles album The Magical Mystery Tour.

*St. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album cover,
1967*



FIRST BRITISH INVASION

British Invasion is a phenomenon that first occurred in the mid-60s. Whilst bands earned their fame at home, the actual goal was to get big across the Atlantic, which would guarantee success and worldwide fame. Life magazine from 1964 opens up saying

"In 1776 England lost her American colonies. Last week The Beatles took them back."

The Beatles took over US charts starting with the first British Invasion and Beatlemania.

Many other artists followed up and also earned their fame in the US, like The Rolling Stones, The Animals, The Kinks, The Who, The Zombies and a bunch of others.

*The Beatles arrive to USA
1963*



GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

The Punk movement emerged in the United Kingdom and became a trend in the early 70s. Punk as a subculture began as a movement against the music, style and idealism of the hippie movement.

The icon of the British punk is probably band Sex Pistols. Members of the band were creating controversial tracks mocking and shaming politics in the UK. Probably the most popular track is God Save The Queen. Whilst using the name of the UK anthem wasn't enough, the band expressed extreme disrespect toward UK politics and questioned monarchy in their lyrics. The timing was also not so great; the song was released in 1977, during Queen Elizabeth's silver jubilee.

They paid their price, Sex Pistols members were caught on the streets and beaten up for their track and had to stand up against the public's rage in general.

Although it was banned by BBC then, today, it is considered to be one of the greatest songs of all time and acts as a monument to human rights and freedom of speech.

Sex Pistols in London, 1977
©Janette Beckman



Behind The Iron Curtain
University of Greenwich
2020