

Inspector

I started losing steam with my first band, lacked the commitment and dedication. As a consequence, there were a lot of changes in the line-up. These “restructuring measures” led to the formation of Inspector.

It all started with two brothers who had been in my brother’s parallel class at the conservatory. Andrej Zubrich could sing really well and played guitar; his brother Dmitry was the keyboarder. Andrej and I developed songs together, which also led to our quick development as a fantastic composing team. We really got along well. We were very ambitious and started looking for other musicians to put a band together. Dmitry was a good organizer and specialized in the search for a rehearsal space, in getting the PR stuff together, tour planning, etc. It worked out great. We gave some mind-blowing concerts as support for Pesnyary and other heavyweights but as our fanbase grew, we started to appear as headliner. This could be why we decided to not only sing in Russian and tour through the USSR but to also add English texts and become a little more international. Inspector was a really cool outfit. Our musical ambition, compositions and arrangements were of course very western-oriented – in fitting with our goal to be an international band. They called it the “Ami-sound”, in reference to America, which was close to a political death knell. No, not close...it was! No more radio and no more TV! The curtain fell, it was over! We disappeared from the local scene overnight...it was time to head off to new shores!

One of them was the Jarocin Festival in Poland in 1989. A lot of western bands were also there and showed us a good deal of respect and the audience thought we were so good that we were asked to come back a second time, which we were happy to do. The second time around we met two German bands, Red Point and Crusader. They had heard us the first time and were so impressed, they invited us to Germany to do a tour together. Crusader came from Hamm/Westphalia and arranged a place for us to stay through the local cultural center, with support of the mayor. Twenty-five years later I still have contact to many of these lovely, kind people and every now and then give lessons at the center.

In Germany – Initial Experiences

Back then we drove through the GDR to West Germany. The western world proved to be a bit of a shock for us. We couldn’t speak any German and hardly any

English; trying to make ourselves understood was pretty funny and we had more than a couple of laughs over it. After we played our first few concerts, we realized that the differences weren’t as massive as we thought. We weren’t any worse than the bands here and certainly didn’t need to hide! We were also able to overcome the language barriers in such a way that led to a good understanding for both sides. It was difficult for some band members and they felt a little helpless, a little bit like strangers and a little insecure; I guess we realized that we were a bit different. But it’s only natural that when you find yourself in a totally new social and political environment for the first time, that you constantly make comparisons to somehow orient yourself. Bands or people in general can probably better understand this when they think back to the first time they were in Russia without any language ability. Even West Germans felt a little uneasy in the GDR at the beginning. I was pretty relaxed about the entire thing and just let things happen at will. The entire outfit relaxed as time went on – they remained naive but honest. That went over really well with the Germans and our local club concerts and open air festivals were absolutely fantastic, really amazing! No matter where we played...at the end of the concert we booked the second one. Some clubs wanted us every week because we packed the joints. We were in Germany at the right time because there was live music everywhere. The scene was humming and it was super easy to book gigs. You could rock every night in a sold-out club! It doesn’t compare to nowadays.

The legendary meeting with Frank Bornemann took place during an open air concert with Inspector. He came backstage right after the concert and said, “I’m totally flashed! I’ve haven’t seen or heard anything this wicked since I don’t when. You guys rocked like it was your last show – like there was no tomorrow!” He wanted us to come to the studio in Hannover the next day. As if he had to tell us twice! Frank had founded the band Eloy in 1969 and was a big producer of bands like Helloween at the Horus Sound Studio. He later produced the Guano Apes. Everything that had to do with the heavy, rock and prog scene was controlled in Hannover. He still has the best-equipped studio imaginable: three recording studios and two apartments...super cool.

Starting in 1989, our Inspector period was comprised of one, two and three-month tours through Germany because our visas were only valid for a maximum of three months. And we suddenly had big problems with the authorities; for some reason they didn’t want to issue us anymore visas. We pulled out all the stops...cultural exchange programs and I have no idea what all else we tried, but the headwind developed into a hurricane. The good news was:

The contract with Ariola was signed and together with a shell-shocked producer team, we recorded our twelve-song CD live in Fairland Studio in Bochum in one day – each one of us in his own cabin but all together, simultaneously. We mixed it the following day. And on top of it, we planned a huge European tour. Our dream of conquering the western rock world finally seemed to be coming true!

The bad news was:

We couldn't start the tour because we couldn't get the shitty visas. I totally freaked out!

The mega bad news and even more of a reason to go ballistic was:

The interpreter we had with us when we signed the contract apparently – in our view – didn't do such a great job. Summa summarum: The producer team was given the entire song rights and I got nothing. This was supposedly because of certain GEMA regulations. Everything went up in smoke! But the wish to finally be able to play in the west helped us get over this unbelievably crooked, bogus and absolutely dishonest action. We had our first CD, Russian Prayer! It was the very first CD in Belarus that was released worldwide! We consider this our little memorial...

In Germany – My Hardest Decision

We had to ditch the German Inspector tour. No work visa, no tourist visa, nothing! The record company told us, "Sorry but if you've only got Belarusian passports, our hands are also tied." The band discussed it long and hard. Some of the members were already married. Immigrate or not? Better to sing in Russian and enjoy the security of state funding? I wanted to play internationally, become a man of the world and discuss with other musicians their ideas and projects. Some of the members were already sick of touring. Some of the wives started in with "territorial and ownership claims" and got really bitchy. I had nothing but music in my head – 100% music. First came rock'n'roll, then nothing for a long while and then music again! It made my family sad to see that I was gone more often and for longer periods but they totally understood what I wanted. They clearly recognized that there weren't a lot of incentives for me to stay home and make music: no real development, constantly going around in circles, boring repetition and local limitations! That was the last thing I wanted, limitations! I had my back up against the wall and there was only one decision to make –