

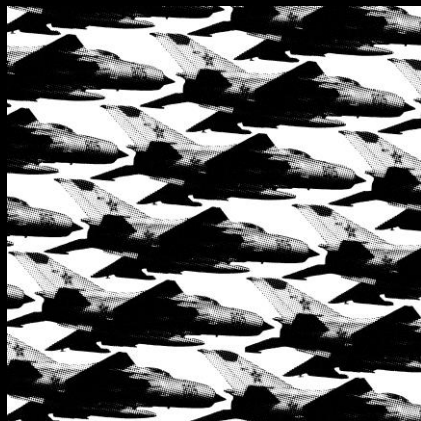
TANCREVAT

#1

EASTERN EUROPEAN POST-PUNK



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COMPANION SPOTIFY PLAYLIST:
[HTTPS://SPOTIFY.COM/DP9M](https://spotify.com/dp9m)

IF THE BRITISH POST-PUNK REVIVAL SCENE IS **XEN LOACH**, THE RUSSIAN SCENE IS **TARKOVSKY**.

Following three decades of faltering revivals and more reboots than **Godzilla**, post-punk has found a new home in Eastern Europe. The soundscape is as varied as any other iteration of the genre but a strong underlying aesthetic of windy khrushchyovka and ominous gothic edge bind the music together, making it instantly recognisable.

The analogies may seem derivative, but they're not unwarranted. Russian post-punk is as effortlessly locatable as Zamrock, and Warsaw Pact dejection is just as integral to the bands as nicotine stained 70's sleaze is to British courdroysphere acts like **Fat White Family** or **Hotel Lux**.

The companion Spotify playlist linked on the inside cover contains music from each of the artists mentioned along with a few extras.

"TODAY YOU LISTEN TO ROCK, AND TOMORROW YOU WILL BETRAY YOUR MOTHERLAND."

Before discussing current bands, it makes sense to put them into a historical context.

Post-punk in the UK can easily be traced back to **Tony Wilson** and **Factory Records**, but it's history in Eastern Europe is much more complex. For a time, any form of art or music associated with the West was outright banned by the Soviet Union. While Perestroika and Glasnost technically lifted this restriction, harsh attitudes towards rock music and poor access to instruments meant that the sparse Russian music scene was internationally eclipsed by the crashing white horse of the British new wave.



Despite this, a few bands like **Кино** / Kino and **Альянс** / Alyans enjoyed domestic success which would later influence contemporary acts.

Debut album **Утро** (Morning) by **Мегаполис** / Megapolis offers an interesting window into the sound of Glasnost. The album flirts closely with an almost cheesy disco sound, but distinctive sonic details and arrangement choices expertly pull the tracks back to a more considered and atmospheric tone as soon as they are in danger of sounding generic.

The instrumentation of the album is similar. Most of the synth parts sound as though they were recorded directly from the sort of cheap keyboard that comes with a DJ button, but they never feel out of place and create soundscapes far surpassing the sum of their parts. The pseudo accordion / melodica at the forefront of **Влажная ложь** (Wet Lies) could easily ruin a song but instead its uncanny wail infuses the track with a haunting and distinctive character.

Initially, the relative lack of domestic influences seems like it would be a hinderance to contemporary acts, but the erupting modern scene demonstrates that this has not been the case. Free from the overbearing presence of untouchable classics, Eastern European bands have been able to pick up any style without worrying about stepping on the toes of any monolithic predecessors. Nostalgia is endemic

to the genre and runs deeply through the sounds, lyrics and aesthetic of the songs but it is more than just a gimmick. The Soviet Union meant that an original new wave never quite managed to materialise in Russia and other CIS countries, so modern artists have taken it upon themselves to create their own.

COLD, NOSTALGIC, DESOLATE

Belarussian three-piece **Молчат Дома** / Molchat Doma are the largest Eastern European group, and as a result will be many people's introduction to the scene. The band effortlessly liaise between a traditional guitar sound and haunting synthpop, combining the misery and style of **Joy Division** with **New Order**'s meticulous basslines and clattering artificial drums; all held together with such confidently stylistic lo-fi production that it could almost qualify as an extra instrument.

СЕГОДНЯ БУДУТ КАСЕТЫ
МОТАТЬ
МОИ ТВОИ ДРУЗЬЯ ПРИШЛИ
ТАНЦЕВАТЬ
Я НЕ ОДИН, И ТЫ НЕ ОДНА

СЕГОДНЯ МУЗЫКА ДО УТРА

КАК ЖАЛЬ, ЧТО Я НЕ УМЕЮ
ТАНЦЕВАТЬ
Я НЕ УМЕЮ ТАНЦЕВАТЬ

 TODAY THEY'LL BE PLAYING
 THE CASSETTES
 MINE AND YOUR FRIENDS CAME
 TO DANCE
 I'M NOT ALONE, AND YOU'RE
 NOT ALONE
 TODAY MUSIC PLAYS TILL THE
 MORNING
 WHAT A SHAME, THAT I DON'T
 KNOW HOW TO DANCE
 I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DANCE

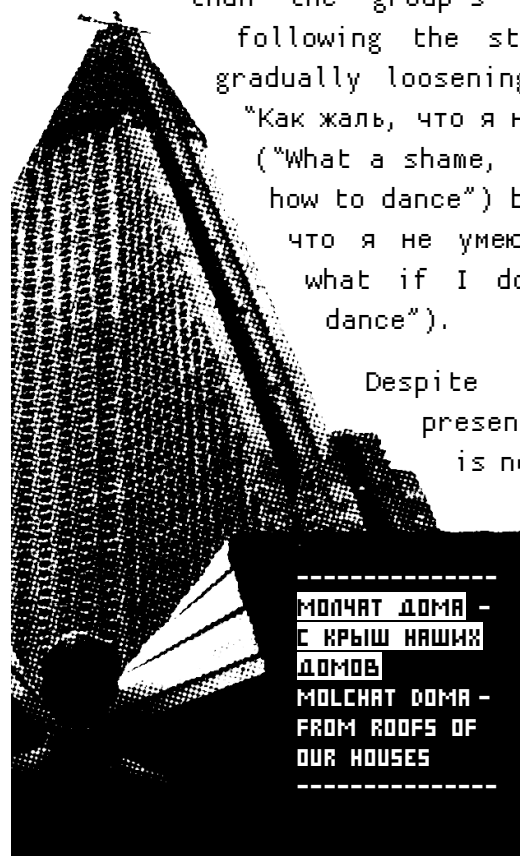
A mournful warbling guitar introduces a wash of equally bleak lyrics about cassettes during the first 35 seconds of **Танцевать** (To Dance), presenting an excellent summary of the Eastern European sound. Naturally, these lyrics are in Russian, but the expression conveyed through the delivery easily vaults the language barrier. The song is somewhat less serious

than the group's usual offerings, following the story of a person gradually loosening up at a party.

"Как жаль, что я не умею танцевать" ("What a shame, that I don't know how to dance") becomes "Ну и что, что я не умею танцевать" ("So what if I don't know how to dance").

Despite the gloomy presentation, **Танцевать** is not a relaxed song.

From the beginning the more emotional elements are backed by a contrastingly high energy rhythm section. The proudly



 МОЛЧАТ ДОМА -
 С КРЫШ НАШИХ
 ДОМОВ
 MOLCHAT DOMA -
 FROM ROOFS OF
 OUR HOUSES

inhuman LinnDrum beat boasts the repetitive sequencing and rapid fills characteristic of hardware drum machines and is supported by a bass which happily sacrifices groove to match this rigid precision.

I personally dislike the tendency a lot of critics have to relate any Russian produced media to communism, but in this case it is valid. Making nostalgic music involves an understanding of the time period being emulated, and for countries East of the Iron Curtain a large part of that was communism.

The execution is unique though. Communism is real to these bands, not an abstract idea which might fuel such misguided endeavours as naming a band **Working Men's Club** then travelling the country harassing cleaners and doormen. The politics of the songs is subtle, retrospective and nuanced; more related to ideas about living under repressive systems rather than expressing a burning desire to change them. The repeated "Я Не Коммунист" (I'm Not a Communist) of **Молчат Дома's Я Не Коммунист** is not an expression of protest, it is an exasperated admission of defeat. The singer cannot live up to the high standards expected of him by the state. **Я Не Коммунист** argues that more than simply being repressive

or unethical, totalitarianism is fundamentally incompatible with the imperfect and inconsistent nature of humanity as a whole.

 МОЙ ДОМ, ТВОЙ ДОМ!
 НОВОСТРОЙКИ

ЕГО ДОМ, ИХ ДОМ!
 НОВОСТРОЙКИ

 MY HOUSE, YOUR HOUSE!
 NEW BUILDINGS

HIS HOUSE, THEIR HOUSE!
 NEW BUILDINGS

Similarly, the chorus of **Новостройки** (New Buildings) by Siberian band **Ploho** oozes collectivism, embodying the hope and optimism of **Khrushchev**'s mass housing schemes. Alone the lyrics seems supportive, but the sombre delivery and paranoid verses ("На всех этажах живут враги" / "Enemies live on every floor") reveal a deep irony mirroring the rift between the utopia promised by empty propaganda slogans and the grim realities of daily life in the USSR.

PARANOID, MINIMAL, PAGAN

A grainy black and white model church on the cover of **Утро** / Utro's self-titled **Утро** immediately contextualises the album with medieval arthouse films like **Andrei Rublev** or **Marketa Lazarová**. Theology, and the conflicts between new and old religions are a central theme to these films and are likewise a central theme to the record. Even through

inconsistent translations the story and lyrics are enthralling, with as much depth as any Czech art film.

АМ ВНУТРИ ПУСТОТА. НО ОН
ДО СЯХ ПОР СТОИТ. ДОМ
ТАМ ВНУТРИ НИКОГО. НО ОН
ДО СЯХ ПОР СТОИТ. ДОМ

THERE'S A VOID INSIDE BUT IT
STILL STANDS. THE HOUSE
THERE'S NOBODY INSIDE BUT
IT STILL STANDS. THE HOUSE

Дом (house) sets the tone with a bass guitar indistinguishable from a funeral toll and lyrics sermonised rather than sang, but the initial measured and ceremonious pace is misleading. Squalls of detuned guitars and disembodied whispers build to a ritualistically crazed crescendo which continues for the first half of the album. The production is scratchy and designed to make the tracks unsettling rather than coat them in fuzzy nostalgia, creating a sonically dense sound which remains restrained and anxious.

Я ПАЛОНИ ОБЖЕГ
КАСАЯСЬ ЕЕ
КАСАЯСЬ ЕЕ
КАСАЯСЬ ЕЕ

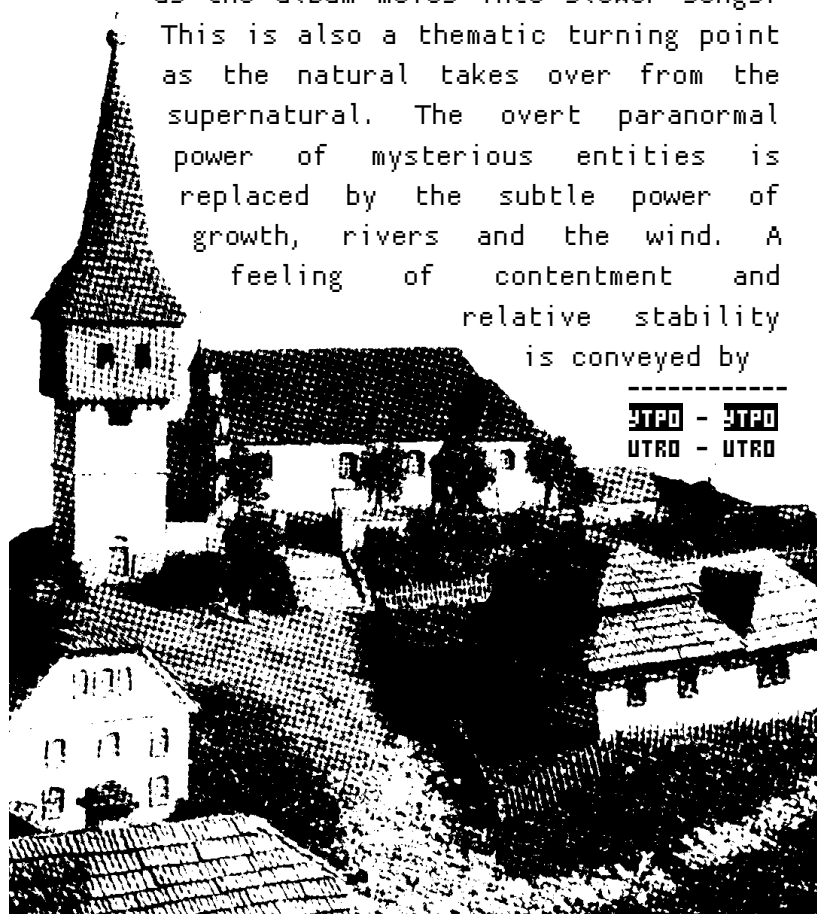
I BURNED MY PALMS
TOUCHING HER
TOUCHING HER
TOUCHING HER

The relentless chant and driving guitars of **Незнакомая сила** (Unknown power) are **Утро** at their most shamanistic and the lyrics reflect this, constructing vivid images of arcane energy so otherworldly that the singer is reduced to clawing helplessly at the dirt of

the steppe after encountering it, but the paganism is short lived.

Как же я был слаб в те дни (How weak I was in those days) breaks the trance of the previous tracks with an uncharacteristically tuneful guitar solo, marking a musical turning point as the album moves into slower songs. This is also a thematic turning point as the natural takes over from the supernatural. The overt paranormal power of mysterious entities is replaced by the subtle power of growth, rivers and the wind. A feeling of contentment and relative stability is conveyed by

УТРО - УТРО
УТРО - УТРО



the music, which meanders lazily through the slowest track, **Сад** (Garden). Despite this peace, without the guidance of a deity or obvious higher power the singer is lost. This dismay at the uncaring reality of a Godless world is explored during **Река** (River) as the singer vocalises his doubts, screaming them into the empty air. After each bout of questioning the track is allowed to fall completely silent in hopeful anticipation of a response which never materialises.

И ПРИНЕСЕТ С СОБОЙ РЕКА
ЛИШЬ КАМНИ
И ГДЕ ЖЕ БЛАГОСТЬ И
МИЛОСТЬ ТВОЯ?

AND THE RIVER WILL BRING
ONLY ROCKS
AND WHERE IS YOUR
GOODNESS AND MERCY?

In **Портрет** (Portrait) the singer finds the guidance they have been searching for in an icon painting. The old ways are abandoned in favour of Christianity, which introduces the final section of the album. As before, the thematic change induces a change in the music.

Души стареют быстрее тел (Souls Age Faster Than Bodies) reinfuses the paranoia from the first half of the LP and **Спесь** (Hubris) brings it to its logical conclusion as wild tuning peg pitch bends undulate over a near permanent drum solo. The lyrics match this frantic sound as the singer becomes uncompromising and fanatical in his pursuit of Christianity.

И всюду запах затухших свечей (The Smell of Extinguished Candles Is All Around) is slower, concluding the album cyclically to match the restrained introduction of **Дом**. The Passion of Christ is overtly referenced by the lyrics, which also directly retcon a vision of three boats described in the second track of the album, **Сон вещей** (Prophetic dream). The actual song ends suddenly, cutting out halfway through a verse. The abrupt cut implies death and the absence of a real end to the track reflects the uncertainty of what might come after the fact. Perhaps the song simply ends, or maybe it carries on indefinitely but unheard. The most enticing possibility is that the whole album and story repeats, suggesting ideas about the resurrection of Christ and reincarnation. The first track does begin with a funeral toll after all...

ОН ТАНЦУЕТ СО МНОЙ ДО
БОЛИ В БОКАХ
НАЛИВАЕТ ВИНО В БИТЫЙ
БОКАЛ
И ВСЮДУ ЗАПАХ ЗАТУХШИХ
СВЕЧЕЙ
НО МОЙ БОГ СО МНОЙ
И ВСЮДУ ЗАПАХ ЗАТУХШИХ
СВЕЧЕЙ

HE DANCES WITH ME TO THE
PAIN IN HIS SIDES
HE POURS WINE INTO A
BROKEN GLASS
AND THE SMELL OF FADED
CANDLES IS EVERYWHERE
BUT LORD IS WITH ME
AND THE SMELL OF FADED
CANDLES IS EVERYWHERE

ПОДАЙ ЕМУ РУКУ ПОМОГИ
ЕМУ ВСТАТЬ
ПОДАЙ ЕМУ РУКУ, ПОСМОТРИ
ОН УСТАЛ

GIVE HIM A HAND TO HELP
HIM GET UP
GIVE HIM YOUR HAND, LOOK
HE'S TIRED

The electronic side of gothic music is also well represented. Artists like **Гласность** / Glasnost and **ШТАДТ** / STADT are the EBM answer to **Lebanon Hanover**; flexing monolithic analogue basslines, Berghain kick drums and howling 303s immediately reminiscent of weird Germans and the Berlin Wall.

SOFT, MELANCHOLY, INTRICATE

Eastern European music has taken off in a huge way over the past year. A deep dive into the dark sea of recommendation algorithms reveals a thriving scene of very active smaller bands with 2020 releases and rapidly growing fanbases. A tapestry of sounds which distil and homogenise the ideas put forward by groups like **Утро** and **Молчат Дома** into something more recognisable as a genre; an area where other iterations of post-punk have historically fallen short.

Дома-корабли (Ship-Houses) by **Последнее Соппротивление** / Last Resistance embraces a more carefree indie vibe, with lyrics presumably telling a similar story to **Ploho's Новостройки** (although I couldn't actually find any translation so who knows). The more approachable side of the scene is also present in **Еду домой** (Driving Home) by **Дисциплина Безбольной Биты**, which takes on a slightly

more modern sound. The lyrics make good use of the flowing nature of the Russian language, proving that it can carry a song just as well as more marketable languages like French or Spanish. **ТЫ И ТВОЯ ТЕНЬ** (You and Your Shadow) by **Увула** / Uvula is similar, with fluid, repetitive lyrics layered and delivered imaginatively to create a song which rolls pleasingly in and out of focus while pushed relentlessly forward by a massive, crunchy bassline.

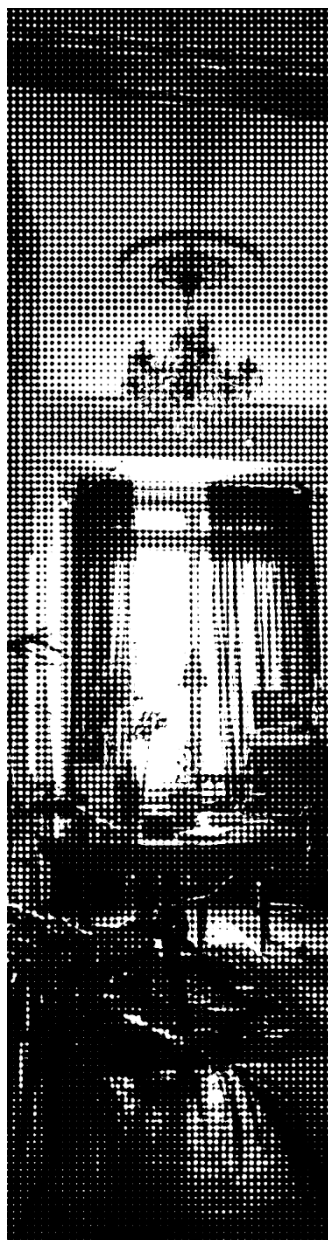
Some bands like **BRANDENBURG** and **Human Tetris** opt to sing in (occasionally endearingly broken) English instead. Recognisable lyrics change the feel of the songs, but the music remains stylistically Russian. It is an interesting litmus test which the genre passes, proving that the music really is unique in its own right and not just because it is sung in an unfamiliar language.

Memorabilia by **Human Tetris** characterises the lighter side of the scene well. Like **Молчат Дома**, the album features fast and laser accurate drums backed by simple **Peter Hook** style basslines, contrasting directly with the relaxed guitars and melancholy vocals. The production is deliberately lo-fi but applied less staunchly than by **Молчат Дома**.

Oversaturated guitars and vocals are allowed to float dreamily over intricate, crystal-clear hi hats and smooth weighty basslines; creating a sound which embraces the nostalgic feeling but remains a pleasure to listen to.

The 2020 album **Ozhog** by **Super Besse** moves closer to dance music instead. Most of the tracks are built slowly using repetitive 909 patterns, liberal rimshots, airy synth pads and sparse, almost haphazard lyrics. The songs are methodical and restrained as the tension is painstakingly built up but become untethered and rapturous once it is released by cleansing, screeching guitar solos.

HUMAN TETRIS - MEMORABILIA



FINAL THOUGHTS

I was lucky enough to see **Молчат Дома** live at Sheffield's **Record Junkee** before the pandemic. The crowd was a mismatched miscellany of people who had stumbled across the band from whatever music they would normally listen to and been hooked by the fresh, characterful sound. A man dressed head to toe in beige corduroy using a flip phone stood shoulder to shoulder with a trench coat wearing emo, a plaid shirt punker and a goth with genuine **Robert Smith** hair (who unfortunately stood at the front for most of the performance).

The atmosphere was completely unfamiliar. Nothing was established and nobody knew how the night would end. The show was excellent of course. Frontman **Yegor Shkutko** had massive presence and performed with all the emotion of his recordings, complete with **Ian Curtis** style signature dance moves. The crowd were happy to sing along whenever they caught on to familiar lyrics and replied with confused but enthusiastic cheers whenever **Yegor** tried speaking to us in Russian. A fitting metaphor for the real triumph of Eastern Europe's post-punk scene: its ability to communicate shared human experiences in a way that transcends language and culture.

PLAYLIST

танцевать - Молчат Дома | Тебя нет рядом -
Воллны | Группа Крови - Кино | На заре - Альянс
| Утро - Мегалополис | Я Не Коммунист - Молчат
Дома | Новостройки - Ploho | Незнакомая сила
- Утро | Река - Утро | Где ты - Гласность |
Раны Земли - ШТАДТ | Дома-корабли - Последнее
Сопротивление | Еду домой - Дисциплина
Безбольной Биты | Ты и твоя тень - Увула |
Rodina - Super Besse | Melancholy - Human
Tetris | No Feelings - BRANDENBURG | Ночь -
Конец Электроники | Valasay - Nürnberg

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