

GENERAL INFO

Black Maloka are a four-piece from Kyiv, Ukraine. They were originally formed in 2012 by astrophysicist Serge and visual artist Artem (who is better known by his alias Kaffelman). Before that, Serge had been writing songs since high school. But he showed little interest in becoming a rock star — mostly devoting himself to science and his university's football team. And then one day, quite fittingly, he met Kaffelman at a Zombies' concert.

Black Maloka are certainly one of the best and most internationally minded emerging music groups in Ukraine. The band's sound is based on a contrast between vivid, upbeat guitar riffs reminiscent of English sixties Garage Rock on the one hand, and socially critical lyrics full of irony and sarcasm on the other.

The band's musical idiom is used to convey simple, clear messages that appeal both to people at home and abroad. Serge is proud of his English language skills, and uses them to build bridges between people of various nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The band believe that borders are artificial constructs drawn up by politicians. The injustices that boundaries create is one of the things the band sings about.

Unfortunately, Ukraine's music scene is pretty isolated. Most bands and musicians "boil in their own oil": They remain unknown outside of the country no matter how popular they are locally. Black Maloka want to change this by becoming global pop stars.

Check them out and then get in touch with the guys:

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BIO (written by Serge)

Our band is called Black Maloka. None of us really knows what that really means. As I see it, Black Maloka is either a substance, or the state you're in when you create something new and wonderful.

I think we started around 2012, although we weren't too serious back then. For our first year or two, we gigged around town. Mostly, we covered our favourite songs by British Invasion/Garage Rock bands. And then we began to write our own songs.

Both me and Artem, Black Maloka's co-founder, belong to the "Lost Generation" of Ukrainian kids. We were born in the dying USSR and grew up in the stormy 1990s. We survived the collapse of the Soviet Empire, which meant poverty and the sporadic absence of basics like soap, toilet paper, hot water and electricity in our apartments. (And forget musical instruments, man!)

My first guitar was a Soviet-produced 7-string acoustic dreadnought, which came from the town of Chernihiv. It was awful. It had been turned to a six-stringer and was the hardest instrument for a beginner to play. I nearly gave up on learning my first chords. But I kept going. Even when my parents told to get a real job and put my rock dreams on hold. Because they still had the Soviet Union in their heads.

"You can keep playing that guitar but you have to graduate university and get a standard job", they used to say. Because being a rock musician wasn't really allowed in the USSR. Indie kids had to act like workers to avoid political persecution. For instance: Viktor Tsoi, the singer from KINO — the USSR's most famous revolutionary rock band — had to get a "real job" in a boiler plant. Otherwise, he would have been put on trial for being a so-called social parasite.

Luckily, I have never had to job in a factory. (Not even one day!) But I did have to work at an observatory once. They called me a junior astronomical fellow. I found the work boring and pointless. I knew I wouldn't become a proper scientist the moment I entered their office for the first time.

All the same, the observatory was a nice secluded place in the middle of a huge park. There, we could hang around until late, jamming on our guitars and looking up at the stars through a vintage sixties Zeiss telescope. This was also the place where the concept of Black Maloka was born, and where our first rehearsals took place.

We've now been in the game for around five years. And it's tough. More than 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet regime, a lot is different in Ukraine. But the life of a rock star, in some ways, hasn't changed since Viktor Tsoi's day. In

most cases, being a musician here means you have to work a shitty, meaningless day job. (That's the only way you'll have the cash to research, record, promote and advertise your band.)

Sometimes you also have to play private corporate gigs, which are called korporativs. Whilst you're gigging, you look out into the crowd. And see distracted people chewing on their snacks and getting drunk on vodka. An event like this might dragoon you some good money, but it somehow makes you feel like a lap dancer performing for oligarchs rather than a punk rock musician.

Technically, I'm not a virtuoso. My guitar skills aren't top notch and I'm not a sterling pianist. Sometimes, I think I'm not a musician at all. People say I have a nice voice. Come off it! That is something you are born with. And it doesn't guarantee you a great career in pop these days. Because there are too many charming voices out there.

In fact, it's not the musical side of me that makes my oeuvre interesting. One can be a pro at music theory, or a technically virtuoso muso, always hitting the right note, and still remain a mediocre songwriter. Songwriting, for me, is about having something important to say and being able to turn your message into a catchy song.

And I'm not showing off when I say that only few musicians are able to write English language pop in this part of the world. In fact, the only guy in town who really impresses me is Louis Franck, the frontman of erstwhile Kyiv rock band Esthetic Education. (But he's a half-Scottish Londoner fluent both in English and French, so maybe he doesn't count.)

Otherwise, Ukrainian pop is far away from the rest of the world. There's more than a dozen local bands who play stadiums here in Ukraine and can't even fill a small club in neighbouring Poland or Hungary. I think we can do better.

Still: These days, I don't see myself as a musician. I'm mostly a conductor/translator/interpreter. One who helps people, no matter where they are from, find out what it's like to live in a country like Ukraine.

Living here today, especially in Kyiv (the huge capital city), is like living on a volcano. You'll never get bored. You'll never need to go hunting for inspiration. You don't have to bend your mind while looking for fresh topics to write about. Because they are already there. Right on the surface.

I simply do not understand why so many local songwriters sing about relationships and flowers and bullshit like that. Because there is so much going on here every single day. In our lifetime, we have seen three revolutions and a war. The Lost Generation has faced persecution, police bullets and the draft. We have survived them all, and we have created one of Europe's most vibrant underground scenes in Kyiv.

There's a lot of bullshit propaganda about Ukraine in the media. It's no mystery why many think it's a chaotic, stuffed-up and depressed post-Soviet state where revolutions erupt every couple of years. (Because foreign journalists are generally overfed arseholes who hang around in hotels and occasionally talk to their taxi drivers.)

So we decided to cut out the "foreign correspondents" and deliver our message clearly and directly in English: Ukraine is a great place to live. It's more progressive than many Western European countries, let alone Russia. And we think Kyiv is just as charming as Paris.

Find out why. Check out our music! And meet us at a show sometime, not far from the Maidan.

