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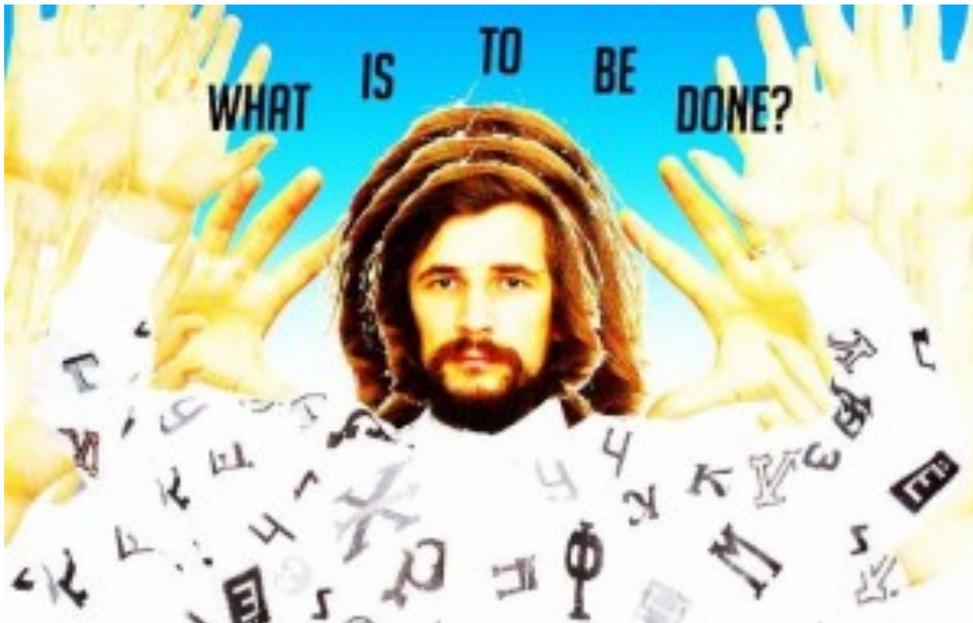
CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN LONDON REVIEW

[Music](#)

CONCERT REVIEW: Sasha Ilyukevich and the Highly Skilled Migrants (Courtyard Theatre 4/11/16)



November 7, 2016



Sasha Ilyukevich

It says in Sasha Ilyukevich's publicity that he's a 'punk rocker', but put away thoughts of 1976 and safety pins – he's a punk rocker in the true sense and as John Lydon would define it: a genuine individualist.

London-based Ilyukevich is a songwriter and vocalist from Belarus and his songs at the Courtyard Theatre were sung almost entirely in Russian – yet he often provided an introduction in eccentric English, whispering and acting out a feeling so that, just as at an opera, it wasn't necessary to understand the words to grasp the emotion of the songs. Bearded in non-hipster fashion, and dressed in a tan suit and T-shirt he had a decadent, flamboyant air, his stage

movements theatrical and expressive. He danced a little in nutty-boy style and produced a satyr's mask at one point, playing the guitar with the mask around his head.

The band line-up was the standard lead guitar, bass and drums with Sasha on semi-acoustic guitar and vocals. The rhythm section was very tight and both the bass and the snare drum nice and loud. Particularly impressive were the sounds coming from the lead guitar, discordant and spooky. This was no punky thrash but well-rehearsed and full of changes in tempo.



They performed eleven original songs in a set that lasted just under an hour. "Is it too loud? Too foreign?" Sasha demanded before the song 'Yellow Arrow', performed solo with Sasha accompanying himself on semi-acoustic guitar. His songs were prefaced by cryptic, but vivid introductions: 'Yellow Arrow' was set up by his saying 'Everyone is scared to leave the train', and he ended the number with a scream, garnering the warmest applause so far; for another track, 'Kamchatka' he muttered 'Volcanoes are changing the mood of the people', and before the song 'Kolya' he asked us for our help in reciting 'the name Kolya, who's groomed to take over from his father', some duly doing so. The final number 'Cold' developed into a powerful crescendo, with that snare driving everything along and the guitar roaring strangulated sounds. There was a good ovation at the end of the show but no encore. Sadly the crowd was on the sparse side, around twenty-five, and for the first few songs there was just modest applause and some polite whooping. But they'd warmed to the band and by the seventh song 'Your Love' a number of them were dancing. There are no seats in this dark smallish room so there's plenty of space for it too. All in all, a rocking evening, which deserved a bigger audience: 'highly skilled' would seem about right.

This show was part of 2016 Dash Arts and The Courtyard Theatre's ASYLUM season which features some of the best of London's migrant artists. Sasha Ilyukevich with his Highly Skilled Migrants next show at the Courtyard will be on Saturday 3 December (tickets £8 in advance, £10 on door). More info on the band can be found by clicking on the right hand image below.

