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The Paradox of Re-Colonization: the European Invasion of American Popular Music, 1961-1969, Professor  
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## ***Rock Around the Bloc: the British Invasion on Native Soil***

### Important dates:

1945-1965:

Mainstream: twist, jazz are popular.

Counterculture: Stilyagi and "Rock on the Bones" dominate.

1957 - The World Festival of Youth and Students, VI, Moscow. The festival contributes a lot to the growth of the Stilyagi movement. Foreign students bring to the USSR Western clothes, records, and drugs.

mid-60s – end of the Stilyagi era and the beginning of the Beatniks era. First beat-bands appear: both official and non-official. Beat dominates both in mainstream culture and in counterculture, with the difference that the official beat is to a great extent adjusted to the Soviet ideology. Tape recorders appear: end of "Rock on the Bones" and start of the Magnetic Era.

late 60s – youth got completely into British and American bands, especially into the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Hundreds of beat-bands appear at universities.

1967 – first record of the Beatles officially published in the USSR.

1967 – Radio Mayak starts a series of programs about Western Music.

1971 – first Rock festival in the USSR, Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) with more than 30 bands playing.

mid70s – Western music appears officially.

1975 – first record of the Rolling Stones published.

1976 – Cliff Richard comes to the USSR. A blast! 12 sold out shows in St. Petersburg and 8 in Moscow.

1980 – The Spring Rhymes Festival in Tbilisi, - "the Soviet Woodstock"

### **Stilyagi**

Stilyagi (style hunters, hipsters) youth underground subculture emerges in the aftermath of WWII and dominates until the mid-60s, when it develops into the Beatlemania movement. Stilyagi were primarily distinguished by their snappy or fashionable clothing, and were considered politically incorrect and contrary to the communist-socialist realities of the time, admiration of modern, especially American, lifestyles, and fascination with modern music and fashions. Records and clothes were partly taken from Germany after WW2 and were later accessible through people going abroad, mainly the Soviet elite.

"Rock on the bones": people duplicated records with a converted phonograph that would "press" a record using plentiful and cheap discarded x-ray plates. Millions of duplications of Western and Soviet groups were made and distributed all over the Soviet Bloc.



### **VIA Music**

VIA (Russian: ВИА), or Vokalno-Instrumentalny Ansambl ("Vocal – Instrumental Ensemble"), was the official name applied to pop and rock bands in the Soviet Union.

Soviet VIAs played a specific style of pop music. They performed youth-oriented radio-friendly music, which was a mix of contemporary Western and Soviet trends. Folk instruments were often used; songs varied from pop ballads, dance-beat disco and new wave to mainstream rock.

## Dean Reed, “the ultimate maverick cowboy”



Dean Reed in the late 60s and in the 70s was probably the most famous American in the world. Everywhere, but not in the United States, where he was considered to be a traitor.

A singer and an actor, he is often called the Red Elvis, partly because of his singing approach close to the one of Elvis, and mostly because of the fact that he brought to the Soviet Bloc a new kind of music – Rock'n'Roll. Everything Reed did was highly welcomed in the USSR as he had strong socialistic views which he was constantly sharing.

This outrageously good-looking American revolutionary and passionate freedom fighter is definitely an inalienable part Soviet of Rock music history.

### Some biographical notes:

1938 – was born in Denver, Colorado, USA.

1958 – moved to Los Angeles, California, where recorded his first album in 1961.

1963 – went on tour to Latin America, where he was extremely popular, and stayed there.

1966 – moved to Rome.

1965 – first visited the USSR. Became hugely popular there, and eventually settled in Moscow.

1973 – moved to East Berlin and lived and worked there till 1986.

1986 – received hate mail from the U.S. following an interview on CBS's 60 Minutes.

6 months later Reed was found dead in Zeuthener Lake. The cause of his death remains unknown.

### Discussion questions:

1. What do you think about the “tough line wall of the American culture” William Roberts is talking about as compared to the Iron Curtain? Does it really exist, or did it ever exist?
2. To what extent music defines culture or is it culture that defines music? In Russia there is a very well-spread opinion that it was the Beatles who contributed to the collapse of the USSR. Could you possibly agree with that?

### Suggested reading/watching:

1. *American Rebel*. Dir. William Roberts. USA. 1985.
2. Ball, Alan M. *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2003.
3. *Dean Reed, the Iron Curtain Elvis*. David Gordon Smith. Spiegel. June 2, 2007. Web. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,466847,00.html>
4. *Kto Vy, Mister Reed? (Who Are You, Mister Reed?)* Dir. Viktor Belyakov. Russia. 2004. Web. [www.rutv.ru/video.html?vid=123880](http://www.rutv.ru/video.html?vid=123880)
5. *Stilyagi (Hipsters)*. Dir. Valery Todorovsky. Russia. 2008.
6. *The Red Elvis*. Dir. Leopold Grün. Germany. 2007.
7. "The Jazz-Rock Counterculture is Born". *The Historical Political Development of Soviet Rock Music*. Tracy Donovan Drake. Web archive. <http://web.archive.org/web/20080615011159/http://www.powerhat.com/tusovka/tus.ch1.html>
8. Troitsky, Artemy. *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia*. Omnibus Press. 1987.
9. Nadelson, Reggie. *Comrade Rockstar: The Life and Mystery of Dean Reed, the All-American Boy Who Brought Rock 'N' Roll to the Soviet Union*. USA. 1991.