

## Il Manifesto

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Rock's first visit to North Korea

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From January 27<sup>th</sup> to February 4<sup>th</sup>: The SeeyouSound International Music Film Festival. Amongst the titles, *Liberation Day* by Morten Traavik and the provocations of the Slovenian band Laibach.

It must have been a dream come true for Laibach to find themselves in North Korea, surrounded by a flock of anxious North Korean minders escorting them everywhere and treating them like the Rolling Stones. They must have tasted the thrill, perhaps not entirely unknown to them, of the immense power that resides in the fear of an uncontrollable reaction to a concert. How exciting merely to think that music still might be able, in some way, to subvert the established order of things. Because it no longer does in our world. Saturated as we are in the mindset of *X Factor*, we no longer remember the fear of music and its effect on people.

And a lot of people don't even know the world we're talking about. It's quite simply another world, and it is that other world Morten Traavik's documentary, *Liberation Day*, seeks out and recounts. Traavik, the movie's narrator – in video form – and an old fan of the group, tells the story of the first ever

rock concert held in North Korea. For non-connoisseurs like us, we might have expected U2, say, or the above-mentioned Rolling Stones, but that wouldn't have had the same subtle appeal.

The Slovenian industrial rock band applies the strategy of over-identification. In practice, it makes use of the Nazi aesthetic typical of the 1920s avant-garde, not from a position of ironic detachment, rather by identifying completely with this aesthetic and thus revealing its existential meaning: "The expression of identification is subversive, because it is in the hidden truths of the symbolic order that its cracks and crevices are to be found." In other words, old worlds meet, interact and are mutually necessary to one another in a dialectic the rest of the world doesn't find particularly interesting. An enjoyable movie, musically interesting, very self-referential, *Liberation Day* is the biggest feather in the hat of Maurizio Pisani, director of the Seeyousound International Music Film Festival in Turin, which is now in its third edition.

"Into the groove" is the six-movie selection personally curated by Pisani. The allusion isn't to the Madonna song, but to grooves in vinyl: "*Into the groove* is the most anarchic and cross-cultural section of the festival, born to fill a void", says Pisani. "It makes room for the more popular movies that didn't find another niche in this edition of the festival." Last year it included an Al Pacino movie, whereas this time it's *Born to be Blue*, the story of Chet Baker's comeback as

interpreted by Ethan Hawke.

But the biggest satisfaction is: “Having beat the competition to snatch the national première of *Liberation Day*. A deal that was brokered after an endless triangulation between me, the director and Wanted Cinema, the Italian distributor of the movie. I wanted it because it’s provocative, stylistically well-made and gives us tiny glimpses into a North Korea that isn’t aligned with the whims of Kim Jong-Un.”