

## **Torino Oggi**

<http://www.torinoggi.it/2017/01/29/leggi-notizia/argomenti/cultura-4/articolo/dentro-la-corea-del-nord-con-la-musica-dei-laibach.html>

### Inside North Korea with Laibach's music

Paulo Morelli

The movie Liberation Day, which opened the third edition of Seeyousound, is a unique glimpse behind the ideological “wall” of North Korea. A precious document.

Everything begins with a crack in a wall. The wall in question isn't made of bricks, but barbed wire, ideology and censorship. The wall is called North Korea and it keeps two worlds apart from each other. There are cracks in the wall, however, and these cracks are called music. Though it may seem absurd, the story of the first rock concert ever to have been held in North Korea (a year and a half ago) began like this. The band that was able to take the stage in an important theatre in Pyongyang is the Slovenian Laibach, an industrial rock group founded in 1980 and known in ex-Yugoslavia and beyond not only for their music, but also for the Nazi-Fascist aesthetic adopted in videos and concerts, for which its members have often been accused of Nazi sympathies.

Among the accusations Laibach have dealt with for

years, there is also that of having contributed to the dissolution of ex-Yugoslavia (an event described in the movie), to which Ivan Novak, founding member of the band, always says: “If the country fell apart because of us, maybe it didn’t deserve to exist”.

Morten Traavik, a Norwegian director schooled in Russia and Sweden, is a long-time fan of Laibach and has directed a number of their videos. Along with the Latvian director and film editor Uģis Olte, he has now directed *Liberation Day*, a documentary that tells the behind-the-scenes story of the week the band and their crew spent in North Korea. The movie is important not only because it documents the event itself, which remains historical, but also for the images that afford Western audiences little glimpses of North Korean daily life, caught as it is between patriotic celebration, incessant praise of the leader, and the search for peace and quiet. Constantly reminding us, of course, that all of this took place under the government’s strict control.

But it is the search for a measure of mutual understanding that characterises the development of the relationship between Laibach and the North Korean censorship committee, who interfere with all aspects of the band’s activities with an eye to “not offending” North Korean symbols, and, above all, not disturbing the sensibilities of the public.

The confrontation between different cultures is at times grotesque. At one point in the movie, Ivan

Novak shows us where the technical equipment in the North Korean theatre gets its electricity from: everything, from instruments, amplifiers and loudspeakers to lights, is connected to a single cable which in turn is connected to a smaller cable that gets its juice from an ordinary, household electrical socket in the wall of a tiny room.

Despite all of this, the concert ends up being held, amid cuts in the band's program and last-minute changes imposed by the North Koreans, much to the frustration of the band's members and their crew.

The glimpse offered by the documentary remains unique because it allows us to see the country from the inside, introduces us to North Korean obsessions, weaknesses and the unexpected humanity in which the regime has sunk its roots. The movie's merit is that it shares with its audience the exhausting efforts of the band and the censors to fit a Laibach concert into the strict guidelines of North Korean censorship.

"The real heroes of the movie," explained the director, Morten Traavik, "are our censors, Mr. Ryu and Mr. Ri, who made all of this possible. I went back to North Korea last October to show them the movie. I don't know if they liked it, we were never able to get a straight answer on any subject. I do, however, believe that North Korea is still attempting to come to terms with Laibach."

"Mutual trust and respect", added Ivan Novak, "are the basis for building any form of relationship with a

North Korean.” He then went on to comment on another episode in the movie, in which he, breaking all norms, went off for a walk on his own. “I did it on purpose, for the movie,” he explained, evidently without having obtained Traavik’s forgiveness just yet, “and that one-hour walk was simply beautiful. I communicated with several people, with my eyes and a few words. It felt like flying or being on drugs.”

But the most grotesque event takes place once they’re back in the West. The movie was supposed to have contained another interview, presumably with a member of the Berlin band Rammstein (that, at least, is what one viewer at the Cinema Massimo guessed). When the editing was done, it seems the interviewee didn’t appreciate the artistic choices of the movie (whether this applies to the subject of North Korea or the music remains unclear) and asked for the interview to be removed. When the director refused, the anonymous interviewee unleashed his lawyers, who evidently succeeded in their intent. The message of *Liberation Day*, however, remains the same.