Gebert Einer Nation: How Laibach turned Queen’s One Vision into a totalitarian anthem (1987)
Laibach are probably Europe’s most grossly-misunderstood band, but they don’t make it easy for themselves. In an age of offence-ometers permanently in the red, there aren’t enough trigger warnings for the veteran industrialists.

Laibach emerged in the early 80s in Yugoslav-controlled Slovenia after the death of Tito, and were immediately accused of treason when they mocked the totalitarian state with grotesque parodies — using nationalist symbols and playing covert gigs in their military uniforms after they’d been conscripted.

They’re probably the only band who’ve been called Nazis as well as extreme communists; they’ve been targeted by a car bomb in Sarajevo on their ‘Occupied NATO Tour’; they’ve declared their own utopian state with passports, released an album of desecrated national anthems and were banned by the Yugoslav state because it deemed Laibach to be the Nazi name for the Slovenian capital Ljubljana.

Whether they’re seditionists, performance artists or political opportunists, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek has nailed it: “Laibach are not an answer — they are a big question mark.”
Laibach are also impossible to pin down musically – over their 30-odd years they’ve darted between rusty, greasy Throbbing Gristle-style industrial noise, they’ve gone EBM, techno and opera, they’ve scored over a dozen theatre productions, they’ve covered the Beatles, the Stones, Status Quo, Europe’s The Final Countdown, Jesus Christ Superstar and kinda invented Rammstein along the way.

Laibach gatecrashed mainstream news in 2015 when they became the first ‘Western’ rock band to tour North Korea – where they played their martial covers of songs from the Sound of Music to government dignitaries and perplexed citizens in Pyongyang, and were treated as curios by confused news agencies copying and pasting each other’s stories. They even forced John Oliver into using the broadest of strokes in his skit on The Late Show.

You could pick literally hundreds of instances of Laibach raising eyebrows, but I got quite a few onslaughts at one of their gigs in Berghain in Berlin a few years ago. Before I could take a breather, I’d seen footage of spinning blood-soaked axe-swastikas, close-up blowjobs, bloody samurai hara kiri and random subliminal totalitarian phrases that could’ve swung left or right. It was also a showcase of their soundtrack for Iron Sky — a film about Nazis on the moon.

In among their industrial slabs of ‘Monumental Retro Avant-Garde’ at Berghain, Laibach also performed brilliant, wry covers of pop, rock and post-punk hits, including clanking, metallic versions of The Normal’s Warm Leatherette, Serge Gainsbourg’s Love on the Beat and Bob Dylan’s Ballad of a Thin Man.
The stand-out, though, was Gebert Einer Nation — their take on Queen’s big pompous stadium rock hit One Vision. By trading Brian May’s overblown guitars for neoclassical fanfares and industrial beats it immediately sounds like a military anthem. Then for added effect, frontman Milan Fras turns it into a totalitarian mission statement without changing Freddie’s lyrics — bar translating them to German, ranting, growling and roaring “Jawohl!” in bridges.

In the hands of Laibach, lyrical fluff like “One flesh, One bone/ One true religion/ One race, One hope/ One real decision” become a grotesque manifesto that’s probably still causing Freddie nightmares in the afterlife.
The song is only half the story, though. The promo for Gebert Einer Nation is — along with their mountaintop shoot for *Life Is Life* — the funniest video they’ve ever made. It's basically Fras leading the troops through marble corridors in full military gear, mixed with footage of his fellow Laibach recruits playing ceremonial horns and military drums, with abstract opera sets behind them.

Back to Berghain, though, and the assault on PC sensibilities didn’t end in the concert hall. At the merch stall they were selling lino prints, philosophy essays, defaced Yugoslav People’s Army shirts, “antisemitism condoms” and a “100% organic soap with special ingredient Laibach S3 – saliva, Sweat
and sperm”. It’s all just good clean fun.

Laibach - Geburt einer Nation (Opus Dei) Official Video, 1987

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