ATTILA THE STOCKBROKER celebrates four decades of the visionary Slovenian band, arch provocateurs who are always one step ahead, musically and politically

JUNE 1, 1980 was the day US TV station CNN made its first (mis-leading) broadcasts to the world. It was also the day Laibach announced their formation in the radical-left mining town of Trbovlje, Slovenia, then part of Tito’s Yugoslav Federation. Given Laibach’s sense of timing and history, you might think the two things were connected. But it was also the anniversary of an anti-fascist uprising in the town 56 years previously and I’d say it was the latter that made them choose the date.

Or maybe both — that would be very Laibachian, looking East and West at the same time. Just like Tito did, and did indeed in a speech sampled on Panorama, the first thing I heard from them, nagged as a freebie from our mutual label Cherry Red Records in the mid-1980s.

Three months after Laibach’s formation I did my first gig as Attila the Stockbroker. So we’re both 40. Or we are as concepts. I’m actually 62: they are ageless. Both 40. Or we are as concepts. I couldn’t go, I had a Canadian tour booked.

Recommended listening and viewing: Laibach:Revised, a 40th anniversary retrospective collection of their early work, A Kind Of Laibach, variations on a Laibach theme by long-time pianist collaborator Volker Wolters and vast quantities of other work is available from their website at www.laibach.org.

Their videos are wonderful and for absolute beginners, I’d recommend The Sound of Music (filmed in Pyongyang) and The Final Countdown (filmed in the late 1980s). Some other gems are the Beatles and Rolling Stone’s “The Final Countdown” in 1985 and signed to Cherry Red — having, typically, first instructed label boss lain McNay to read and sign their “Covenant Manifesto” by candlelight in their north London squat.

Even if I didn’t — band ideologist Ivan Novak says it’s definitely possible, but it wasn’t with him — Playing Table Tennis With Laibach is a great title for a poem. I certainly remember meeting them, hearing about their history — banned under actually existing socialism for extreme totalitarian imagery, beat that — and blagging and listening to their first UK release, Panorama/Decree and Nova Atropuca.

At that time, I decided that I loved the idea of Laibach — the German name of Slovenia’s capital city Ljubljana, a name which is deep a provocativion — more than the music. I’m not a fan of extreme martial-industrial noise.

But, to my delight, over the years they have in the main firmly embraced the Pop-pinionist principle that a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, starting with their utterly epoch-defining brilliant cover of the truly awful Life Is Life by Open Opus Delit. Their first release for Mute in 1987.

They must have just walked down stairs from Cherry Red to sign with Mute label boss Daniel Miller and they obviously liked him, since they went on to cover his seminal 1978 electropunk single Warm Leatherette which, accidentally, started the label off in the first place.

From then on Laibach soared, forging the future as they said they would on their very first release. After amiable deconstructing the Beatles and Rolling Stones for a bit of idle fun in the late 1980s, they released Kapital with a sardonic smile as the European Union opened up in 1992. Let’s! They invented it before it started.

Then they stared down Western aggression against Yugoslavia with their first truly brilliant album Nato in 1994. On this one, they did a stentorian cover of Europe’s The Final Countdown and, for their beleaguered country, it really was just that.

Then since they’ve tackled religion (Jesu Christ Superstar), 1996 nationalism (Volk, 2006) Bach (Laibach/Künstlerberg, 2008) and Nietzsche (Also Sprach Zarathustra, 2007) with their trademark mixture of their own compositions and interpretations of the work of others.

But their two absolute tour de force albums are Spectre, released in 1995, and their stupendously ridiculous reworking of The Sound Of Music, prepared for their much-publicised gig in Pyongyang, North Korea in 2015, which was recorded for posterity in the fascinating and often hilarious film Liberation Day.

And it’s the surreal, provocativer gigs and actions that they have enacted over 40 years that I most love about Laibach, from their early days winding people up in the “actually existing socialism” which they simultaneously irked and admired — “we have always believed in communism with a human face” — to the brave “unity” gig in Sarajevo as Yugoslavia was torn apart and the North Korea trip. To name but three, there have been many, many more.

I love Laibach because I share those fascinations and love of challenge and provocation. I have done the same, shouting anti fascist poems at fascists in the early 1980s, touring the GDR four times as one of the first punk performers before the Wall came down, doing the first ever illegal punk gig in Stalinit Albania and yes, being invited to North Korea in 1989 for the Festival of World Youth and Students — I couldn’t go, I had a Canadian tour booked.

Oh, and being the after-dinner speaker at Brighton & Hove Estate Agents’ Annual Dinner, which made performing in front of Albanian Sigurirnici, secret police feel like a dodggle. I am a shorty poet, Laibach a wall of sound but if ever we are brothers under the skin. As Ivan says — stay safe, but not too safe.

Happy 40th birthday, comrades. You have gone from being a minimal sone to a national icon in your home state and have dedicated followers all over the world. Carry on forging the future for as long as you want — which could be a very long time indeed.