



TRIBUTE

PROVOCATEURS: Laibach in concert in Bochum 2017; (middle) Eva Bereznikar and (bottom) Milan Fras  
Top pic: Markus Felix/Creative Commons

# Laibach and think of what's to come

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 (misleading) 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, blagged 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.

Theoretically, Laibach could last as long as the human race does. Because they're not a band in the conventional sense, they're a multi-discipline collective whose individual members can and do change according to circumstance, musical and artistic requirements and, in more recent times, age.

They are challenging, demanding, inspirational and very funny – yes, I said funny, all you confused music-press pundits over the years – and utterly unique. Their political-cultural actions over 40 years

have been brave, radical in a good way, provocative and catalytic.

If you're fed up with current borders, they have their own virtual state, NSK, and they'll issue you a passport if you like. When they choose to, which isn't always, they create some of the most beautiful music I have ever heard – think Ernst Busch with a growly voice meets Hans Eisler and Kraftwerk with orchestral accompaniment.

And through their unique concept they have discovered the secret of eternal youth, if they decide to. Not bad for a bunch of clever kids from the Slovene equivalent of Barnsley.

In the mid-1980s, Kensington Gardens Square in west London was the home of Cherry Red Records, who signed me after my first John Peel session in 1982 and put out my first two albums and a couple of EPs.

Cherry Red had the top floor and immediately below was Mute Records, then just starting out, now a major player. The two labels shared a table tennis table, and many of the acts associated with both would turn up to blag some free records, go to the pub together, get totally pissed and, inevitably, have a game of table tennis.

I loved table tennis and played countless games with fellow performers, including various members of Depeche Mode, the Monochrome Set and Birmingham's legendary Nightingales. And I am more or less certain that I played table tennis with Laibach one day after they came to London from Yugoslavia in 1985 and signed to Cherry

Red – having, typically, first instructed label boss Iain 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 releases Panorama/Decree and Nova Akropolis.

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 itself a provocation – 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-pinsist 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 Opus on Opus Dei, their first release for Mute in 1987.

They must have just walked downstairs from Cherry Red to sign with Mute label



Pic: <https://www.laibach.org/>

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 amiably deconstruct-

ing 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. Lexit? 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.

Since then they've tackled religion (Jesus Christ Superstars, 1996) nationalism (Volk, 2006) Bach (Laibachkunstderfuge, 2008) and Nietzsche (Also Sprach Zarathustra, 2017) 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 2015, 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, provocative gigs and actions that they have enacted over 40 years that I love most 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.

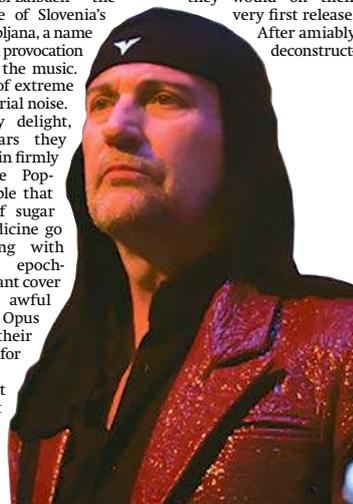
I love Laibach because I share those fascinations and love of challenge and provocation. I have done the same, shouting anti-fascist poems at fascists in the early 1980s, touring the

GDR four times as one of the first punk performers before the Wall came down, doing the first ever illegal punk gig in Stalinist 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 Sigurimi secret police feel like a doddle. I am a shouty poet, Laibach a wall of sound but I feel 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 national sore 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.

■ Recommended listening and viewing: *Laibach Revisited*, a 40th anniversary retrospective collection of their early work, *A Kind Of Laibach*, variations on a Laibach theme by long-time pianist collaborator Vollmaier and vast quantities of other work is available from their website at [wtc.laibach.org](http://wtc.laibach.org). Their videos are wonderful and for absolute beginners, I'd recommend *The Sound of Music* (filmed in Pyongyang) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oD0W6SSBUA>, *We Are Millions and Millions are One* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYv4FhL5bdU>, *The Whistleblowers* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6Mx2mXpaC>, *Vor Sonnen-Aufgang* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b39CfCN2bNE> *Live is Life* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LB9I0bWclFQ> and *The Final Countdown* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E72v6G9JHY>



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