

Don't Look Back: Ljubljana (SR Slovenia)

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Vol IV: Rock and Pop Music in Ljubljana in the 1980s (incomplete overview)

subject to change

Well, the story of YU punk-rock officially starts in Slovenia. Punk rock (and strange local branch of RIO) flourished in this Alpine region and encompassed the whole country due to small size of the northernmost and in some ways most progressive former Socialist Republic. The first independent music labels were situated only in Slovenia in the beginning. 'Novi rock' festival in Ljubljana had similar function as YURM in Zagreb, giving chance to local talents. In addition to that Novi rock organizers were inviting interesting foreign bands from independent / underground sector and presenting them to Yugoslavian rock public. Igor Vidmar from Radio Študent had the key role in promotion of new rock music (comparable to John Peel's radio DJ efforts in UK albeit with very modest broadcast range) in Ljubljana/Slovenia.

Ljubljana (Laibach) is a lovely small town, compared to Zagreb or Beograd. However, it was equally gray and dull as the rest, just a different shade of boredom. To an accidental passerby and stranger, like I was, it always seemed sleepy and tranquil.

— punk rock / new wave —

Who were the culprits and catalysts then? Slovenian bastards – Pankrti!



a step back:

Satirical blues-rock of bearded granddads **Buldožer** (1975-84) that bulldozed and paved the way for critical thought in mid 1970s YU rock (if they didn't update the sound farther than Zappa) should be mentioned as pre punk introduction note.

Buldožer - Novo Vrijeme



Prog punks '79

Anyhow, **Pankrti** are proud parents (they were already students close to 25 years of age) of the first independently released punk single “Lepi in prazni” in 1978. It’s nothing to write home about today but way back it was important harbinger of the new. Heavier and typically mid pace recordings that followed sound like the first generation of punk music in general, steeped in garage rock and glam. It’s hard not to like Pankrti. They were consistent on record all the way except for the last album. These days my favorite would be 2 x 7 inch “Namesto tebe” (1981). Pankrti softened already at the time of their sophomore studio album called “Državni ljubimci” (1982). On the next one called “Rdeči album” (1984) the song arrangements became even more complex with ornamental overdubs added and as a result album is upbeat but a bit bloated too. “Pesme spravi” LP (1985) (produced by Angelic Upstarts guitarist) brought back grittier guitar sound and leaner songwriting. Mature effort “Sexpok” LP (1987) is a disappointing closer. Adio Lublana!

Other Slovenian punk primers like Lublanski psi, Berlinski zid, 92 and Buldogi straddled the thin line between old school punk-rock and original new wave.

Berlinski zid (punk-rock group w / keyboards that was developing post-punk approach in songwriting), **92** (punk-rock band with psychedelic organ reminiscent

of the Stranglers; keyboards role was toned down later and new-wave elements crept in) and **Buldogi** (charming ska-punk kids) were included on legendary VA “Novi punk val 78-80” LP (1981) together with Pankrti and few Croatian punk bands.

Sinister punk-rockers **Lublanski psi** (I like a lot their songwriting style but don't know much about them in general) and again primary school punks Buldogi, along the second wave of wild teenage punks from other towns (Kuzle, Industbag, Šund), ended up on the subsequent various artists punk album “Lepo je...” (1982). It was released under coordination of ever-present Igor Vidmar.

At some point in 1981 happened infamous “Nazi punk affair” staged by the System and things got heated for a moment. So, when the creative energy could have really dissipated new generation of bands took over the “scene”...

— post punk —

Here comes the wave of furious post-punk bands: Otroci socializma, Laibach, O!Kult, Borghesia, d'Pravda, Via ofenziva and Čao pičke & very soon after them wild hordes of hard-core punks.

Almost all of them were refined provocateurs whether they chose to operate like an alien cultural organization (Laibach), a sharp-witted individual observer (Otroci socializma & Via ofenziva), a personal rights association (Borghesia) or a group of anarchic idealists (O!Kult).

Otroci socializma were an excellent post-punk band formed after split up of early punk band Berlinski zid. Brane Bitenc, young poet and punk, gave the band distinct individuality that easily separated them from the rest. When I better think about it he had some traits in common with M. E. Smith – stage presence, stature and diction. His sensibilities were different though. At the end (or during the second phase) Otroci socializma started to mess with plastic funk and marred their sharp minimal rock sound with bloody electronic drums in the studio (a bad *zeitgeist* decision in retrospect, like lazy Jet Black did in the Stranglers). I don't mind fretless bass, it's fine with me. Otroci socializma had two indie tapes out in circulation: “self-titled” (1982) and “Kri” (1986). Their members (drummer &

bassist) were also guest musicians with Laibach in the studio. Otroci socializma allegedly recorded set of songs for never realized album on ZKP RTVL label – the finished master tapes mysteriously disappeared in transit between record companies.



Otroci socializma

Similarly focused post-punk band (~ Gang of Four/PiL influenced) with something to say in between lines (and quite directly!) were **Via ofenziva**, led by another young man with tendency toward poetic expression among punks – Esad Babačić. They didn't last long but what has been left after them is pretty cool.



Via ofenziva

Via ofenziva shared split cassette release with **Čao pičke**, issued on independently oriented and very important [Galerija ŠKUC izdaja](#) cassette label (as was the first tape by Otroci socializma). Čao pičke were short-lived drums & bass band with 15 years old punk girl Alenka Marsenič Marsa on vocals. Their brevity and minimalism were mirrored in one minute long no-wave song sketches. After the break up Marsa continued with brilliant Tožibabe, group that moved in hard-core circles. Bass player resurfaced in jazz-rock Lolita in the second half of the 1980s.

O!Kult (from nearby satellite town Medvode) were young leaders of New Left. Early period of their activity under Crass influence was documented on anarcho-punk cassette “Razredni boj je edino gibalo zgodovine” (1983). Few years later they managed to release debut mini LP through German indie label Dossier records. On this overlooked album, divided into 4 long tracks running slightly over half an hour, O!Kult enriched minimalist post-punk with touch of funk groove and repetitive industrial elements. After demise of the band frontman Brane Zorman continued to compose music for theater and art performances.



O!Kult

Borghesia were early on post-punk band with drum machine and subversive collective of multi-media artists simultaneously. At first glance, when portrayed as duo, Borghesia resembled DAF but they were not that similar musically. Borghesia were also notorious for exposing “forbidden” kinds of love, certainly existent but hardly visible during Communist era. Spiritus movens Aldo Ivančić was in addition fully involved with setting up the scene around FV Disco Club and FV Založba indie label. He recorded/produced “Zastave” LP together with Paraf. I am quite fond of Borghesia’s early recordings issued as cassettes (s/t collected early songs; “Clones” was composed of soundtracks for short video films) & debut vinyl album (mostly early material from the 1st tape) titled “Ljubav je hladnija od smrti” LP (1985). In the second half of decade they were making music that could be categorized as (lukewarm) computer generated EBM. I’ve always thought that the sound of not fully controllable analog synths & primitive DIY electronic kits (submerged in white noise to some degree) depicts general unrest or physicality of rough sex much better than the one produced by earliest digital equipment available. Having said that, I keep “Ogolelo mesto” LP (1988) in collection – I dig dark electronic vibes a la mid 80’s Severed Heads. Borghesia’s passion and interesting ideas were present (boiling under surface) all the time but only partially realized/translated via home computers in the second half of the decade. EBM electronic movement is fine but I am going to stick with period when Borghesia mingled with postpunkers. To each his own...



Borghesia

Laibach (Trbovlje – Ljubljana – London – world) didn't care at all about rock'n'roll disguised as punk-rock. Their fancy was tickled by Throbbing Gristle and Kraftwerk. Instead of having strapped electric guitars on, Laibach picked best fitting hunting clothes and old uniforms, shined leather boots, oiled trumpets and horns, dusted off snare drums, trimmed their hair to perfect cow-lick... and stepped down from the small town theater stage to challenge (mock) totalitarian or oppressive system/s of this sad world. Original singer of the band hanged himself. Few bigger scandals happened. The name was banned. The group went into exile... but Laibach prevailed in the end. Backed by bigger contract (Mute) for "Opus Dei" LP (1987), that included successful cover/hijack of Austrian white (cod!) reggae hit "Live is Life", Laibach immersed themselves in the world of POP media manipulation and later digital electronic music / techno. Don't know about you but I always return back to unnerving spot by *kozelec* for some post industrial thrill. All their early recordings are excellent up to 1986. Laibach electronic spin offs **300.000 V.K.** and **Keller** should be mentioned as well. That 30 years later they would have a concert in North Korea of all places is really unbelievable.



Laibach

Enigmatic and ephemeral **d'Pravda** were provocative art project as much as amateurish band in between RIO and Dada post-punk. As far as I am informed they recorded set of demo songs in the summer of 1982 and soon disappeared.

— hard-core punk —

Teenage hard-core punk is usually on the margins of this website story telling but there were couple of really interesting and pretty pissed off bands in Ljubljana. Early hard-core sampler worth hearing is “Kaj je alternativa?” tape (Stres D. A. / U.B.R. / Odpadki Civilizacije) from 1983. Even better overview of Slovenian aggressive punk is offered on independently released various artists record: “Hard Core Ljubljana 1985”. (U.B.R., **III. kategorija**, Epidemija, **Odpadki civilizacije**, Tožibabe)

Pioneering hard-core band **U.B.R.** also left behind a cult single EP record issued in Italy in 1984. All girls (post) hard-core band **Tožibabe** managed to put out one of a kind seven inch EP locally. Initial HC phase by melancholic **Niet** was released on cassette only.

In other words Ljubljana (& SR Slovenia in general) was big and well-connected punk kindergarten / youth center unlike the rest of the SFRJ (with the exception of

Rijeka and perhaps Novi Sad).

— synth pop —

Ubiquitous Iztok Turk (ex Kuzle, ex Otroci socializma) among other things also formed synth-pop group called **Vidosex**. Vidosex soon overshadowed any of his previous bands being commercially quite successful. Their self-titled debut is solid all the way through thanks to bits and pieces of vintage minimal electronica. Pleasing (sometimes too pleasing) POP aspect was saved by the remarkable and seemingly innocent voice of 16 years old singer Anja Rupel. The second album “Lacrimae Christi” (1985) got quite strong side A. The best songs are reminiscent of mid period New Order.

Somewhere here I'd squeeze anomaly of **Gast'r'bajtr's** (from Brežice, not Ljubljana!) Their debut LP “Ni življenja brez ljubezni” (1983), issued on then newly founded independent label Dokumentarna, offered slightly sterile sounding mix of new wave influenced funk rock with saxophone and drum machine. Gastrbajtrs were not melancholic depressives but high spirited guys and that they were preferring drum box to real drums is quite puzzling to me. They formed few spin offs: arty **Demolition Group** and Silver Barracudas before returning to more energetic Gastrbajtrs dance-rock format few years later. The second album “Pot v raj” (1988) brought them closer to Miladojka Youneed.

Otroci socializma II (“Kri” 1986) under the influence (*Alkohol*) were treading synth-pop waters (*Mlačna voda*) in the late night hours (*Noč*) too.

— RIO & jazz —

Another very important but less known group that influenced Slovenian early 1980s was RIO type of band with specific folk aspect called **Begnograd**. They stirred the city's RIO scene during their second phase of activity and over the time attracted fans of this genre of music from all over the world. Great and weird debut s/t album (1982) is very recommended!



Na lepem prijazni jazz-rock band, as presented on their only album, lacks a bit of forward pushing kinetic energy which was as crucial ingredient for the time of production as it is today.

SRP crowned years long career with a conceptual avant-garde album that resembles soundtrack for a theater play. Recalling RIO, Zappa (jazz-rock period) and drunken cabaret at once, I doubt that SRP sounded like that on stage in concert. Like d'Pravda they crossed paths with post-punk youth occasionally.

Quatebriga (ex Begnagrad) excluded dissonant folk elements from the mix and recorded two jazz-rock albums in mid 1980s. More straight forward "Revolution in the Zoo" LP (1985) is excellent.

Miladojka Youneed started off at the point where city's jazz-rock predecessors like Na lepem prijazni stopped and added hard core energy. Cutting down singing a little they left space for bleating saxophones to talk. Early jazz-punk Miladojka Youneed was awesome. Check out their first release issued on cassette only! They were simultaneously free and tight, playing eccentric combination of jazz-funk and punk. Unfortunately, the sound of debut record "Ghastly Beyond Belief" (1987) is produced too aggressively. Perhaps they strove for inhuman machine-like sound wishing to be extra repulsive. Industrial sheen of digital (~ ghastly) recording can sound terribly shrill to my jaded ears on a bad day, especially when it comes to drums. Too bad. With the second album "Bloodylon" (1990) Miladojka Youneed moved too far inside the dance rock territory for my liking.

...

Otroci socializma could be main protagonists of post-punk chapter in this pretty exciting period of Ljubljana's rock and pop history. If they had an official album realized it would be for sure put on a pedestal here. Luckily post-punk and other "underground" or "alternative" happenings have been documented through already mentioned ŠKUC izdaja & FV založba small labels. Viva Ljubljana! The three most representative records for a short and intensive retrospective trip would be:

(1) Borghesia "Ljubav je hladnija od smrti" (85) , (2) Various Artists "84" (84) & (3) Laibach s/t (85)

Don't Look Back vol. IV: Ljubljana (1-2-ex-YU!!)

VA Post-punk Ljubljana (1982 – 85)

Otroci socializma – Lublana (live) (1982)

O!Kult – Molitev (live) (1982)

d'Pravda – Socijalizam (1982)

Laibach – Rdeči molk (live) (1982)

O!Kult – Mi!Mi!Mi! (live) (1982)

Laibach – Država (ver.) (1983)

Via ofenziva – Minimalni ritem (1983)

Otroci socializma – 700 usnjenih torbic (1983)

Borghesia – Divlja horda (1983)

Čao pičke – Pesem B (1983)

O!Kult – Tovariši (čigavi?) (1982)

Otroci socializma – Vojak (1983)

Via ofenziva – Proleter (1983)

Laibach – Mi kujemo bodočnost (1984)

SRP – Svuda ljudi, svuda zastave (1984)

O!Kult – Collective Consciousness (Kolektivna zavest) (1985)

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VA **Punk** (punk-rock, new wave, hard-core) Ljubljana (1978 – 85)

Pankrti – Anarhist (1978)

Lublanski psi – Anti proti (1980)

92 – Kontroliram misli (1980)

Berlinski zid – Po cestah mesta (1980)

Buldogi – To ni balet (1980)

92 – Od šestih do dveh (1980)

Berlinski zid – Revolucija (1980)

Pankrti – Gospodar (1981)

Lublanski psi – Neumni, odpisani in prazni (1981)

Buldogi – V kotu sveta (1981)

Pankrti – Za železno zaveso (1982) live

Otroci socializma – Hiše so sive (1982) live

Via ofenziva – Jugoslavija (1983) live

Pankrti – Slavni razglas (1983)

U.B.R. – Utrujenost (1983)

Stres D.A. – Domovina (1983)

Niet – Umiranje (1984)

III. kategorija – Za tebe (1985)

Odpadki civilizacije – Vojna-smrt! (1985)

U.B.R. – Zgodovino piše zmagovalec (1985)

Tožibabe – Dežuje (1985)

Pankrti – Sistem svobode (1985)

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VA **Queer** (synth-pop, minimal synth, EBM, industrial) Ljubljana (1983 – 87)

Borghesia – Ljubav je hladnija od smrti I (1984)

300 000 V. K. – TV generacija (1983)

Gast'r'bjatr's – Tu mač prežr (1983)

Borghesia – Secret Affair no. 2 (1984)

Vidosex – Ana (1984)

Borghesia – Nočne šetnje (1984)

300 000 Verschiedene Krawalle (V.K.) – Policijski hit (1983)

Laibach – Brat moj (1984)

Borghesia – Secret Affair no. 3 (1984)

Otroci socializma – Možgani (1985)

Vidosex – Sivi dan (1985)

Otroci socializma – Moj svet (1985)

Laibach – Die Liebe (1985)

Keller – Senza amore (1986)

Borghesia – Ni upanja, ni strahu (1987)

[download.](#)

VA **Jazz** Ljubljana (prog, jazz-rock, avant, RIO, jazz-punk): TBA