



VEZHLYVY OTKAZ

avant-rock | rock in opposition | experimental jazz | urban romance | avant-folk | futurism / constructivism

Seven years after Vezhliy Otkaz's highly acclaimed *Geese and Swans* album came out, the most original and erratic avant-rock band from Russia released their long-awaited *War Songs* album. Some of its parts date as far back as summer 2008, but Otkaz, known for its meticulous approach to composition, did not rush things up, opting instead for a gradual development and experimenting with various lineups in the process—from a hard-hitting rock power trio to an extended quasi orchestra nonet.

As ever, VO's music is much more than it appears on the surface—the band expands the boundaries of traditional song form, deconstructing it from within while taking cues from a magnitude of styles and genres of the past and present. Partly similar to what the Rock In Opposition artists were doing in the 1970s and 1980s, the band relentlessly bridges gaps between high avant-garde art and lyrical folk song, classic rock and experimental jazz, writing their own set of musical rules instead of clinging to any existing ones. The music is free, both in its general idea and in its execution, and remains as continuously surprising as it always used to be during the band's 30-year tenure.

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Why War Songs? "War to me is a kind of internal conflict, a civil war, a citizen's war,—says Roman Suslov, the band leader, principal composer and author of all the latest lyrics as well as abstract vocal parts.—It's a personal thing, but also an attempt to put the old wartime (Soviet) songs in the new context. Initially I thought we'd play it a-la soundtracks to old Soviet movies but then I abandoned those plans and set everything on a completely different track. But in the back of my mind I always kept those very songs, which had bored the wits out of me many years ago. I couldn't stand them when I was a child, and now they are symbols that I want to send off to different musical worlds."

"Those original songs are like wormholes, paths that listeners can find in our new compositions. They've got some accessible, dare I say beautiful melodic passages as well as totally destructive, noise-laden, vicious sounds that reflect the destructive nature of war."

"To me all this military stuff is inherently tragic, and I'm not being ironic about it; I'm completely honest here. To me it's like a fine edge of an inflamed nerve. Hell knows what it is about, but it's always there, inside me."

As of 2017 fall Vezhliy Otkaz are moving full speed ahead: the band has released their tenth studio album thus bringing the first half of the current decade to a close, while simultaneously rehearsing **new music** written in 2016 and over the 2017 Christmas. The trio that was involved in intense experimentation with new material during almost all of 2016 has been expanded to a septet having brought on board a keyboardist from the band's classical 1989-92 period and a saxophonist from its golden 1994-02 era. This is the Vezhliy Otkaz revamped in the year 2017.



photo by Vladimir Lavrishchev

That's exactly what they do—Suslov and associates take a phenomenon and start turning it every which way, inspecting and dissecting, before putting it back together in sound. And this they do within the tradition of composed music, which is so clearly atypical of today's rock scene.

This time the thing being dissected is war. As a slogan, as an ideologeme of confrontation, as a phenomenon that is unhealthy, unnatural to begin with but apparently necessary to the humanity. As deformation—mental, but physical as well, as destruction. What started nine years ago with the spooky "klezmer" of "We Will Win" ended in the War Songs—a fierce, somewhat atonal, unique musical look of an inquisitive natural philosopher and a perfectionist at the very essence of what's next to us all the time.

Perhaps one has to push off the word "war" to appreciate the understated beauty of this music, to see the inner harmony among these layers, to get the feel for the game, to appreciate the inherent irony—and to finally get the band we are lucky to have among our contemporaries.

(Artyom Lipatov @ SalonAV)

- ▶ **WATCH:** [Ouverture \(War Songs\)](#)
- ▶ **LISTEN:** [Sky Shooter \(War Songs\)](#)
[We Will Win! \(War Songs\)](#)
[Infantry in the Trenches \(War Songs\)](#)
- ▶ **NEWS:** [Official Website](#)
[Facebook \(personally\)](#)
[Facebook \(official page\)](#)
- ▶ **CONTACT:** v.otkaz.cc@gmail.com

The vocal compositions by Vezhliy Otkaz that we know are oftentimes art songs rather than just songs in both meanings of this word: as vocal compositions where the lyrics and music seem to follow each other rather than being imposed using the verse/refrain formula, and in the common sense—as cruel romance. As such, Vezhliy Otkaz is virtually reconstructing the 1910-20s of Russian history, namely, a combination of Russian musical avant-garde (futurism/constructivism) with the grassroots culture that never really happened.

(Dmitry Ukhov @ www.openspace.ru & Billboard)

Geese and Swans incorporated few war songs but new material kept arising and has already been arranged into a War Songs suite. Otkaz has by far not for the first time turned to war matters (Civil War doublet in Geranium, or Waltz in Go to it!..) but this time only the war is brought to the foreground of an entire album—devoid of propaganda and naturalism, tormenting, violent and obscure.

An unconventional band set, complex rhythm patterns, intricate melodies and junctions between piece parts produce a totally unique sound which VO seems to be seeking throughout its existence.

(Gregory Durnovo @ "Kommersant")



Vezhliy Otkaz was formed in 1985 with a then-popular reggae/ska blend. Since then, they have gone through numerous stylistic changes, flirting with everything from free jazz to Russian folk. Their sound, however, has always been unique and immediately recognizable.

Suslov's rhythmic guitar work and unusual high-pitched vocals gives Vezhliy Otkaz's music a precisely constructed, crystal-clear sound that is [...] so well organized that sounds almost academic."

The band published **ten studio albums**, available worldwide (in deluxe edition by **Geometry**) through Milan based **Altrock** label.

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