

PREFACE

By Robert Šoko

I see myself as someone who has something to say. Or at least believes he has something to say - provocatively perhaps; a little bit crudely sometimes; politically incorrect always. I'm no writer. It would be a lie if I said I was one. Why delude myself? I'm no Hemingway - Bukowsky maybe. No, but seriously, I didn't need to write this book. This is the beautiful thing about it. Nobody pushed me to do it, sticking a pistol to my head, saying "Write!" But a book is what we have prepared for you - a book about what I did and my role in the Balkan Beats movement, packed with a myriad of small insights, observations, kvetches and discoveries from others in the scene - from well-known figures like Goran Bregović, Dr. Nele Karajalić, Esmā Redžepova, Shantel and Eugene Hütz, to lesser known but no less interesting Balkan players.

In this book Robert Rigney and I join forces, as it were, hewing out a space in time for my crazy thoughts, putting them in the context of the world-wide Balkan Beats hype. The result will be shocking for some. I was, after all, a cab driver and a DJ. What does that mean? It means nightlife. It means sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. All this we set forth here with absolute candor.

What I would like to convey to readers in Germany, Europe and around the world, is that Balkan Beats was a wave, a movement, a bundle of synergies, a moment in time, a sunbeam which made us ex-Yugos finally look sexy after all of those crazy and pointless Balkan wars of the nineties. And music was the key.

I saw that with our Yugoslavian punk rock music we could not reach a new level of awareness. Yugo punk was a mere copy of Western musical styles. Nothing against it - I love it - but this is not ours. Turbo-folk is ours, but it is a despicable manifestation.

In Yugoslavia of the nineties turbo-folk was mostly pushed by the Socialist regime to distract the nation and hypnotize the masses. It also mirrored and fed the glamorization of war criminals and war profiteers to some extent. Some of the singers sang about national aspirations, but most of them sang about love and materialism and ficky ficky and fuck me here, fuck me there, your car and my boat - pure escapist bullshit, basically.

What was missing was a place in the middle - what I called - and have coined - *Balkan Beats*, which strove to preserve the traditional elements and flavors of the Balkans while giving them a new dynamic understandable to the West. And this is what happened. We managed to skyrocket *Balkan Beats* into a scene and a genre of World Music, next to tango, salsa and reggae, and what have you.

This book also deals with my alcoholism; my drug addiction; my rascally misbehavior and gross misconduct; my identity crisis; how my life fell apart at the seams - and then came together again. I don't want to look stupid in front of people; at the same time I don't want to present myself as a sleek, sanitized superstar. I'm just another Balkan bastard, and that's it.

Also important is the city of Berlin. Without Berlin, *Balkan Beats* would never have happened. This book pays tribute to the city that nurtured me in this, my musical adventure of thirty years standing.

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