

A HISTORY OF THE FESTIVAL BAND

according to Stefan Kitanov - Kita

I met Peter Georgiev – Pesheto in 1988. We were sitting together during the rehearsals of the “Sredets” choir. We were both tenors. I joined the choir in the autumn, soon after my daughter Ana was born. In the spring of 1989, the choir went on a tour in Greece. Pesheto said that he would bring his guitar. Then I knew he was a musician! I took my guitar too. In the bus, on the way to Athens, we prepared the first repertoire of Kita and Pesheto and we performed it at Omonia Square, right after the bus arrived there.

After the 10th of November 1989 Pesheto went to play in restaurants in Norway and I went on the street and became one of the first buskers in Sofia after the democratic changes. It was an incredible time. In the beginning I played in underpasses, because it was cold – the underpass in front of the “Pliska” hotel was the warmest. In the spring, my favourite spot was in front of a bench on “Vitosha” blvd., on the corner with “Neofit Rilski” str. Then Pesheto came back and joined me. We played in the underpass of “Pliska”, the National Palace of Culture and Eagle’s Bridge, on “My spot” at Vitosha blvd., in front of the “Sveta Nedelya” church... Several times we were joined by the Danish clown Luna, with whom we made a short video in front of the National Palace of Culture. It was the end of april-may 1992.

[KITA & PESHETO * Early May 1992](#)

A few days after that video, we were playing at the underpass of the National Palace of Culture when my friend Alexander Yanakiev (professor at NATFA and a film critic, he passed away a few years ago at the age of 60) came to us and said “*Kita, at the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers there is a competition for a director of Cinema House “Me and Yanko Terziev (one of the most famous Bulgarian film critics, he was programming the “Druzhiba” cinema at the time, now he’s a columnist at “Capital”), we believe that you’re very suitable for this job. If you can, please take a break from your performance for a little and go to the Union to fill an application”*”. I asked Pesheto to play alone for half an hour. In two weeks I got a call and in the middle of May 1992 I became Director of Cinema House. “I arose in society”, but I kept on playing on the street. Once, I believe it was June that same year, together with Luna and a friend of his – a magician, we did a big show with music, clowning and magic at the Crystal garden, right in front of the office of the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers. It was a crazy party, I remember that “Sofia’s Bagpiper” Peter Bonev played too, he was usually playing music in the small garden between the Parliament and Sofia University.

Some of the evenings when we were playing at “My spot” on “Vitosha” blvd, we were joined by Kiril Stoyanov – Kiki. But somehow it wasn’t right for the director of Cinema House to play on the street and a bit later we went to the first ever rock club in Sofia, The Red Lion. The owner, an elderly Englishman who also had a pub at the village of Lozen, liked us and included us in his programme. We were playing there once a week. There were also other

musicians in the club. B.T.R. were also playing there, if I am not mistaken. Me and Pesheto started playing with Kiki and the Andy Barrett (an Englishman, teacher of English who was married to a Bulgarian) band. Because of my responsibilities at Cinema House, my gigs were becoming fewer and fewer and Pesheto joined Andy's band. In the beginning I was playing with them, we had some gigs at The Red Lion and the Lozen pub. Together with Pesheto we kept on playing in pubs – we were playing at the “Mamma Mia” pizza house on the last floor on “Kaloyan” str., at the Radio City club, the club next to NATFA a club on “Stamboliyski” blvd... We had a songbook of a 100 songs and everyone could request whatever they liked. The repertoire included Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, CSN, the Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley, Eric Clapton...

In 1993, together with the British Council we co-organized the first Rock Film Fest. We opened it with a big concert at the Summer Theatre, organized by Radio Tangra and we closed with a performance by Shturcite (one of the leading Bulgarian rock bands founded in 1967), who hadn't played together for a long time. Together with Pesheto we opened the film programme at Cinema House with a performance of “*Mrs Robinson*” with two guitars and without microphones. Here's how “*Mrs Robinson*” looks 27 years later in the conditions of isolation:

[“Mrs Robinson” 2020](#)

In the autumn of 1993, I went to England on a post-graduate course in art management. I came back in April 1994 and I had my first acceptable acoustic guitar – Yamaha. At the time No Breaks had created their own repertoire, they also played covers. In June the second Rock Film Fest took place. Once again, the opening was with a big concert by Radio Tangra at the Sumer Theatre. We opened with “*California Dreamin*” by the Mamas and the Papas, then No Breaks continued on their own. Incredible atmosphere. The concert ended with a performance by Georgi Mintchev and Stari Mucuni and Bob Dylan's “*Knocking on Heaven's Door*”.

[Rock Film Fest 1994](#)

Throughout the years me and Pesheto continued playing on Sofia's club scene. One of the last ones was “Planet” next to Cinema house, when it was still a rock club. In 1996 we opened first the Monty Python Festival at Cinema House with “*Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*”. Once the song began, Valdi Totev from Shturcite came up onstage and started playing the piano. Since then we're friends and sometimes we play together.

In 1997 the first Music Film Fest took place. It developed from the idea of the Rock Film Fest, but with films from various film genres, together with live music every night, performed at the hall of the Veslets Community Cente. At the time, Ivaylo Kraytchovski - Pifa from FSB was our music director. He selected the bands and was responsible for the musical program. One of the evenings we played together with Pesheto and No Breaks. Since the Music Film Fest is the Beginning of the Sofia Film Festival, you can say that this was the first line-up of the Festival Band. Vaso Gurov from Revue then joined the band, In september that same year the unforgettable tour of Passport Scotch Whiskey took place and they engaged our band to play on promotional concerts all around Bulgaria, beginning with the park in front

of the National Palace of Culture. The most memorable concert was in Veliko Tarnovo. The stage was set in front of the Regional History Museum, and the hall – that was the entire city, layed amphitheatrically in front of us. Amazing!

We kept going that way for the next few years. Another Music Film Fest in 1998, twice a Sofia Music and Film Festival in 1999 and 2000, when it all became the Sofia International Film Festival in 2001. Through all these years and after that, Pifa would organise the musical programme. The clubs were different – Mister Punch, Swinging Hall and Backstage. At Mister Punch we worked with Amebata and Funky from SME, and at the Swing and Backstage with Galyo from the Dirty Purchase. We kept the format for many years, at least 10-15. Every year there was a concert of The Festival Band. Pifa would always come up for one or two songs. Other friends would join too.

In 1999 in the frame of the SIFF, there was a big concert organized by the Yellow Music Label and the bands Ostava, Animacionerite, Wickedada and Blubalu at the Military Club. We opened with a performance by The Festival Band, the song was probably “*My, My, Hey, Hey*” by Neil Young.

Then The Festival Band was joined by Vaso Gurov from Review and the drummer of Animacionerite – Mitaka (Dimitar Argirov). Gradually the singer Angel Kasparyanov joined the band. With this line-up, including Kita, Pesheto and Vaso Gurov, we could perform more challenging songs like the ones by Led Zepellin, Jimmy Hendrix and Pink Floyd. In that same year, 2003, we were heard by Stefan Laudyn, director of the Warsaw Film Festival. Two months later, in May, he was performing alone some classical guitar pieces at the Finnish Film Foundation party at the Splendid hotel in Cannes. We were together with Stefan Uhrík at the party, he was programming the Forum of Independents programme at Karlovy Vary at the time and later became the director of Febiofest in Prague. It turned out that all three Stefan’s played the guitar. Everyone had their own profile, Uhrík was a bluesman.

In 2004 Stefan Laudin and Stefan Uhrík were already a part of the Festival Band in Sofia in March. That same year the band was invited for the first time to perform abroad – at the Utrecht International Film Festival in the Netherlands. We were guests at the Film Market and we gave a concert at the Winkel van Sinkel hall. That’s where we were heard by the European Film Promotion and starting in 2005 we played for several consecutive years at their parties in Karlovy Vary (co-organized together with the Variety magazine, for three consecutive years! During one of the concerts we were joined by Variety editor in chief for Europe – Steven Gaydos – that’s how we had for the first time 4 Stefan’s onstage.) and at the Shooting Stars party at the Adlon Kempinski hotel next to the Brandenburg Gate (the Band was then joined by the actor and friend of ours Samuel Finzi. Legendary director of the festival Dieter Kosslick also joined for two songs. He broke a string during the first one, but he liked it so much, that he stayed for a second one.)

Years went by. Thanks to the active coordination by Stefan Laudin, we were invited to more festivals – Sarajevo (twice), Thessaloniki, Palic, Motovun, Munich, Vilnius, our last gig for now was in Lecce in 2019, where the three Stefan’s were also in the jury. Our most professional concert was on the 16th of October 2009 at the Palladium Hall as a part of the

25th anniversary of the Warsaw Film Festival. The musical director of the concert was Polish rockstar Tomek Lipiński, founder of the band Tilt. We played together in Warsaw and Krakow with him. Director and editor of the video is director and actor Grzegorz Lipiec – Lipa. The concert was produced by the Warsaw Film Foundation and besides the Festival Band, many Polish musicians came onstage, among whom were Less Dress, Olaf Derilasoff, Rude Boys (Marcin Szwakopf and Marek Szwakopf), Adam Lewandowski and Tomek Lipiński.

Gradually The Festival Band changed. For many years the leading vocals were performed by Nufri of the Panican Whyaskers, Vaso Gurov of Review was on the bass and Dakata, who played with both bands, was on the drums. And of course, me and Pesheto and the two Stefans – Laudyn and Uhrik. Since 2003 The Festival Band plays at the Closing party after the Award Ceremony of the Sofia Film Festival and since 2004 the party also marks the end of the Sofia Meetings Co-production Market. Since the audience is international, the program includes mostly covers of famous rock bands. We rarely perform our own songs, such as Vaso Gurov's "Tchitcho". We invite musician-friends for every concert. We performed with Kiril Maritchkov and Valdi Totev from Shturcite, Ivaylo Kraytchovski-Pifa and once with Konstantin Tsekov from FSB, Stefan Valdobrev, Veselin Todorov and Oggy Tsolov from Factor, Stefan Dimitrov, Vasko The Patch, Angel Angelov – Djendema. Among the guests of SIFF who have been onstage are Lenny Abrahamson, Murat Ertel and the dancers from Turkish band Baba Zula, Eran Kolirin, Ognjen Svilicic, Maria Järvenhelmi, Andreas Ströhl, Alejo Taube, Thorsten Ritter, Claudia Landsberger, Renate Rose, Nikolaj Nikitin, Jan Budar... German film star Katya Riemann was twice with us, the second one she came especially for The Festival Band gig. Once Volker Schlöndorff came onstage to sing the back vocals of "Sympathy for the Devil" and later told us that he was in the studio in Paris and sang "Wo-woo" on the original record of the Rolling Stones in 1968.

In 2007 Stefan Valdobrev invited The Festival Band to record the song "Backgammon Dice", which was part of Stephan Komandarev's film "The World is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner". Director Svetoslav Draganov shot a [videoclip](#). Later Valdobrev did a Bulgarian version of the song – "A Shore Most Green" with vocals by Ruth Koleva that became a major hit.

In the last years, the festival band has as its core the Bulgarian rock band Delta Roosters, which consists of Anton Serkerdjiev (vocals and guitar), Pesheto (guitar and vocals), Radoslav Milev (bass) and Lyubomir Bozadjiev (drums). And, of course, the three Stefans – Kitanov (vocals and guitar), Laudin (guitar) and Uhrik (guitar). The band is also joined by the renowned Turkish musician and composer Selim Atakan, and sometimes by Valdi Totev and Stefan Valdobrev.

Waiting for The Festival Band's concert on the second Saturday of the 24th Sofia International Film Festival!

THE FESTIVAL BAND CONCERTS (2004 - till now)

Sofia - Sofia Land, March 14, 2004
Utrecht - Winkel van Sinkel, September 2004
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 13, 2005
Karlovy Vary - Postovni dvur, July 2005
Sarajevo - S Club, August 2005
Warszawa - Browarmia (unplugged), October 2005
Berlin - Hotel Adlon Kempinski, February 13, 2006
Sofia - Boyana Studios, March 19, 2006
Karlovy Vary - Postovni dvur, July 2006
Warszawa - Cafe Kulturalna (unplugged), October 2006
Thessaloniki - Warehouse C, November 2006
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 17, 2007
Munich - Künstlerhaus, June 22, 2007
Karlovy Vary - Postovni dvur, July 2, 2007
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 15, 2008
Kraków - Alchemia, June 1, 2008
Palic – The Festival Restaurant, July 25, 2008
Motovun - outdoor, July 29, 2008
Warsaw - Palladium, October 16, 2009
Sofia – Stage at Novi Han, March 13, 2010
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 12, 2011
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 17, 2012
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 16, 2013
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 15, 2014
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 14, 2015
Vilnius - April 2, 2015
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 19, 2016
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 18, 2017
Sofia - Central Military Club, March 17, 2018
Sofia - City Stage, March 17, 2019
Lecce - Officine Cantelmo, April 10, 2019