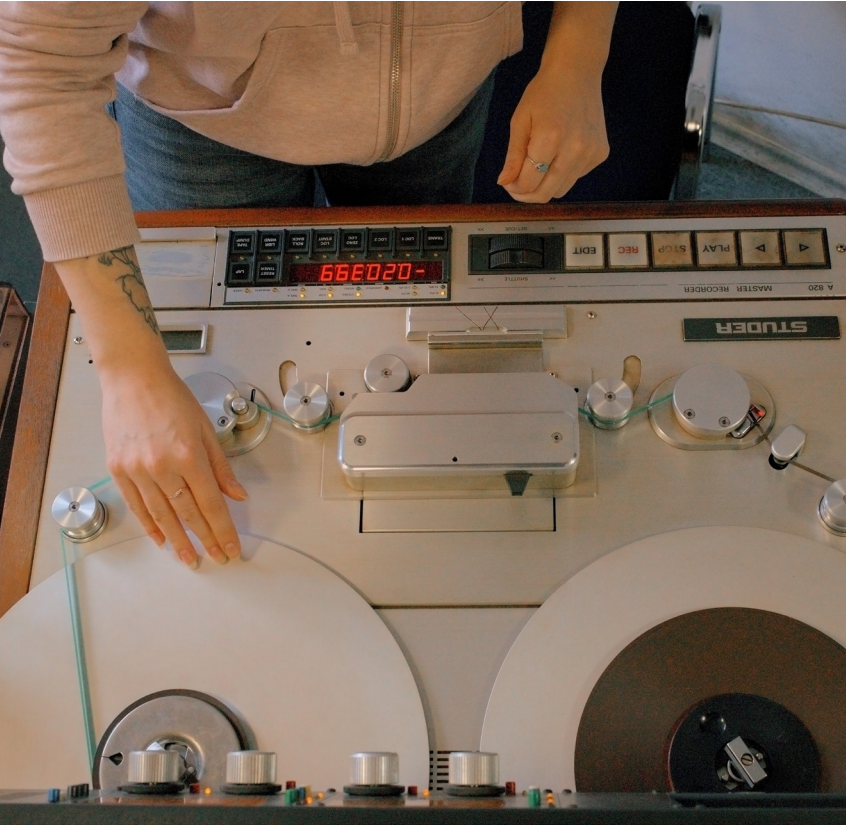


CULTURE



National treasures

MUSIC / RUSSIA

A change of ownership has given a once-mighty Soviet recording company a new lease of life.

By Alexei Korolyov
Photography Evgeniy Rein

Melodiya is a household name to anyone who grew up in the Soviet Union. From its launch in 1964 to the late 1980s, the former state-owned record label enjoyed a near monopoly on music across the socialist world. Its swirly logo appeared on the packaging of almost every record and cassette sold during that time – from those of saccharine Soviet crooners to The Beatles. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 put paid to this exceptional status but Melodiya is now spinning in a different direction with a new sense of purpose.

In February 2020 the Russian government sold the once-grand recording company to audio-branding business Formax in a deal worth just €4m, bringing an end to three decades of oscillating fortunes and chronic underinvestment. During this barren period the label was forced to shed employees, sell off its factories and, most recently, swap its iconic headquarters in central Moscow – home to sumptuous recording studios – for an ill-equipped office in a former hospital block.

Despite paying a bargain-bin price, Melodiya's new owner has brought energy back to the music label, dampening fears that private ownership would destroy whatever remained of its cultural cachet. "This is a great brand, a mighty one, and I am happy that we employ a lot of young people who are ensuring that it will live on," says Karina Abramyan, Melodiya's deputy

general director. She shows us one of the label's newest releases, a compilation of the songs of celebrated Soviet-Russian singer Maya Kristalinskaya. "Our chief mission is to digitise and preserve our entire archive of 240,000 records," says Abramyan. "It's the largest archive in the country and we have already converted about 80 per cent of it."

Digitising rows upon rows of original source tapes, which are piled high on Melodiya's ground floor, is no easy task. Some of the tapes are damaged or missing sections of music. Meanwhile, operating the audio consoles manufactured by venerated Swiss company Studer requires considerable technical skill. Most of Melodiya's 40-strong staff are sound engineers, editors and restorers, who deliver as many as 20 albums a month to online streaming platforms, such as Spotify or Apple Music. Some of the albums are also released on CD and vinyl.

Shored up by digital sales and sponsorships by banks, charities and crowdfunding initiatives, Melodiya is also slowly returning to recording new material. While in the Soviet era the company's catalogue spanned all genres, from spoken word and aerobics instructions to obscure funk and jazz groups from the USSR's far-flung republics in Asia and the South Caucasus region, today the focus is mostly on classical music. "There is a sense of continuity among classical musicians because many of them want to have their music released on Melodiya," says Abramyan, citing Gabriel Prokofiev, grandson of composer, pianist and conductor Sergei Prokofiev, as an example.

Melodiya's future looks bright. There are new offices beckoning, with much-needed storage facilities and equipment, and new talent to record. "Melodiya belongs among the best of Russia's cultural heritage," says Abramyan. "In fact, a lot of that heritage, such as the country's classical music, only exists thanks to Melodiya."

melody.su

- (1) Tape being fed through Melodiya's audio console
- (2) Deputy director Karina Abramyan
- (3) Boxes containing analogue tape

LOOKING OUTWARDS

PUBLISHING / UKRAINE

How a small publishing house's big ideas are exporting visions of a new Ukraine.

By Hester Underhill
Photography Oksana Parafeniuk

From portraits of Ukraine's female railway employees to a book about its Soviet mosaics, publishing house Osnovy irreverently celebrates the country's eccentricities. "What we're doing is important for a positive image of Ukraine," says Dana Pavlychko (*pictured*), the company's director.

Osnovy celebrates its 30th anniversary next year. When it was founded by Pavlychko's mother in 1992, it focused



on textbooks and classic literature. After it neared bankruptcy 12 years ago, Pavlychko transformed it into a more contemporary publisher that supports emerging talent. "We've worked with some of the best names in illustration, photography and art," she says. Head of a team of 21, Pavlychko is always thinking of how the company can grow. Three years ago she launched the Ukrainian Young Book Design Awards; in November she unveiled a new shop-cum-café in Kiev. "We want to show people that a book can be something to really celebrate," she says.

READING LIST

BOOKS / GIFTING

From dazzling illustrated books to gripping novels, our recommendations for printed gifts will delight adults and children alike.

By Chiara Rimella



'Nature and Me', The School of Life

Alain de Botton's The School of Life offers plenty of philosophical perspectives to adults but here the institution has lessons for children too. This book teaches them how nature can be a tonic for the soul.



'Lemon', Kwon Yeo Sun

More than just a crime novel, *Lemon* is an exploration of guilt and how hard it is to shake off. Yet its plot, about how a young girl's murder can be solved 17 years later, will keep you glued to the page.



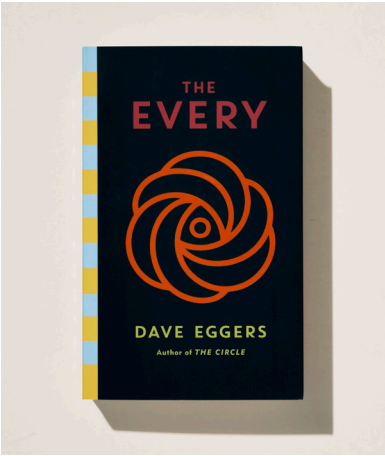
'Journey to the Last River', Teddy Keen

With its detailed, scrapbook-style illustrations, this book takes young readers on a journey through the Amazon for a wild, old-fashioned adventure with the "Unknown Adventurer".



'Russian Tales', Dinara Mirtalipova

Uzbek-born illustrator Dinara Mirtalipova brings dazzling colour to these traditional tales of dragons, heroic quests and Baba Yaga. Here, Russia's classic stories are collected in a tactile hardback edition.



'The Every', Dave Eggers

In this dystopian satire of where we are and where we might be heading, Eggers describes a new technology behemoth created by a merger between the world's biggest search engine and e-commerce site.

FILMS, BOOKS AND ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

CULTURE ROUND-UP / GLOBAL

The winter holidays are a time for assessing the year that was. Our panel reflects some of 2021's cultural highlights.

FILMS

MARIANA ENRÍQUEZ
Argentine journalist and author of short story collection 'The Dangers of Smoking in Bed'.

'Titane', Julia Ducournau
"Risky, strange and at times difficult, it's a ground-breaking picture. I was hypnotised."

SARAH MCNALLY
Founder of New York's independent bookshop McNally Jackson.

'Summer of Soul', Questlove
"I was riveted by every second. It was more than my brain could metabolise."

PHILIP KNATCHBULL
CEO of UK cinema chain Curzon.

'Another Round', Thomas Vinterberg
"Mads Mikkelsen plays a man who experiments with microdosing in this perfectly balanced black comedy. It really pulled me in."

ALBUMS

MIEKO KAWAKAMI
Japanese author of 'Breasts and Eggs'.

'Blue Banisters', Lana Del Rey
"Staggeringly beautiful. I am inspired by Del Rey's determination to release new work."

EVA LANGRET
Director of art fair Frieze London.

'Sometimes I Might Be Introvert', Little Simz
"Little Simz is wonderfully creative, personal and distinctive. My current musical obsession."

KELVIN HO
Australian architect and director of Akin Atelier.

'Day/Night', Parcels
"The perfect mix of upbeat rhythms and optimistic melodies. If Simply Red and Daft Punk collaborated, it would sound like this."

BOOKS

CHRISTOPH AMEND
Editor of Germany's 'Zeitmagazin'.

'Ich denk, ich denk zu viel', Nina Kunz
"Switzerland's best-selling columnist thinks that she's thinking too much but she's wrong. And that's good for all of us."

MARK COUSINS
Northern Irish director of 'The Eyes of Orson Welles' and 'The Story of Looking'.

'Everybody', Olivia Laing
"Protesting, dancing, your nervous system – Laing's vivid book is about all of these things."

SCHOLASTIQUE MUKASONGA
Rwandan author of 'Our Lady of the Nile'.

'Madame Hayat', Ahmet Altan
"Altan wrote this in prison where he, despite everything, intended to pursue his freedom of thought and express himself."

MARCIN WICHA
Polish graphic designer and author of 'Things I Didn't Throw Out'.

'FIO', Olga Medvedkova
"A few pages in, I had the thought that this might be the book of the year."

IGIABA SCEGO
Italian journalist and author of 'The Color Line'.

'La plus secrète mémoire des hommes', Mohamed Mbougar Sarr
"With compelling and exquisite writing, this young Senegalese author has created a book that is halfway between a thriller and a philosophical essay."