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TURNPARK ART SPACE

## Boris Grebenshchikov to open TurnPark Art exhibit with music shaped by Soviet underground

By Christopher Marcisz, Eagle correspondent  
May 6, 2026

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Boris Grebenshchikov, seen here at the Savoy Theatre in Helsinki, N.Y., in 2025, will play at TurnPark Art Space on May 17.

Ivan Bessedin

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WEST STOCKBRIDGE — Even as the Soviet Union became a stagnant police state, the underground music scene where Boris Grebenshchikov and his band Akvarium began was a small pocket of another cosmos.

His earliest work is a sonic landscape that borrowed folk rock from the West and added Russian melodies and lyricism. With flashes of psychedelia and blues, their songs described the everyday life of drab concrete housing blocks and gruff tram passengers, while also imagining shimmering cities in the distance and exciting ideas from other places waiting to be met.

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## If You Go

**What:** "Boris Grebenshchikov: Portal"

**Where:** Gate House Gallery, TurnPark Art Space, 2 Moscow Road, West Stockbridge

**On view:** May 17 through June 18

**Information:** [turnpark.com](https://turnpark.com)

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**What:** Boris Grebenshchikov: Live Acoustic Concert

**Where:** TurnPark Art Space, 2 Moscow Road, West Stockbridge

**When:** 6 p.m. May 16

**Tickets:** Sold Out

**Information:** [turnpark.com](http://turnpark.com)

For Grebenshchikov, known affectionately by millions of Russian music fans as ‘BG,’ that spirit of creation and community in the face of impossible odds was not a moment in time but a way of life. Even after the system that could have imprisoned him crumbled and his world expanded — and even now as it contracts once again in a new era of repression and violence — the importance of making art endures.

“I honestly don’t know what my artistic practice is,” he said. “When I feel like it, I play guitar, or sing, or paint, or translate or write radio shows. No time to be bored.”

At 72, Grebenshchikov doesn’t keep still. On May 16, he’ll be at the TurnPark Arts Space to celebrate the opening of "Portal," an exhibit of his paintings. He’ll be performing an acoustic set in the park’s outdoor amphitheater, with keyboardist Konstantin Tumanov, as he prepares a small American tour for their most recent album, “Strange News from Another Star,” released last February.

“He can creatively express a lot of things Russian people feel now,” said Katya Brezgunova, the founder and creative director of TurnPark. “Of feeling helpless in front of the constantly shifting world, and at the same time that feeling when you find some kind of strength to move forward, and where you can find it in creativity and understanding deep within your soul.”

Originally from Moscow, Brezgunova described hearing Grebenshchikov’s work from her older sister, with whom she shared a room growing up. He was an essential part of the music landscape, often described as Russia’s Bob Dylan.



Boris Grebenshchikov's artwork will be on display at TurnPark in West Stockbridge.

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Grebenshchikov's story begins in Leningrad, the imperial capital which was and is now called Saint Petersburg, a city perched on the edge of the Baltic Sea that always faced west in ways the rest of Russia didn't. It was both cultured and gritty, and it was Grebenshchikov's hometown where he studied mathematics at university and, in 1972, started a band with a group of friends.

Reached by email, Grebenshchikov described hearing Western music on the BBC and Voice of America on shortwave radio. He was particularly struck by The Beatles, in particular that sonic breadth of "Revolver" and "Sgt. Pepper's

Lonely Hearts Club Band,” which were passed around from friend to friend on reel-to-reel tapes, an underground version of “magnitizdat,” an auditory version of “samizdat,” handmade cultural reproduction.

It was a window into another world, and he was especially intrigued by how George Harrison introduced Indian sounds to a wider world.

“After listening to these songs for some time, it became a priority to me to learn about the culture that produces music of such power and beauty,” he said, which led to learning about sacred texts like the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. Over the years, he even made his own translations into Russian.

By that time in Soviet history, it was possible to carve out a parallel space to pursue a creative life under the most DIY of conditions. Artists didn’t have access to mass audiences or reliable income streams. But they had each other, and places to play in clubs like the semi-official Leningrad Rock Club, where eager music fans sat in theater seats to hear new sounds, though under the gaze of KGB minders.

The content of the work remained elusive to avoid scrutiny, but it was broad enough to appeal to people across time and space. Akvarium swept up a variety of sounds and instruments, with cellos and flutes and electronic noise loops. Friends and collaborators in other bands would explore post-punk new wave, or metal, or avant-garde free jazz. Grebenshchikov always seemed to be near the center as a performer, mentor, and cheerleader.

As the Soviet system dissolved, Grebenshchikov evolved. He collaborated with Western artists like Dave Stewart from Eurythmics and The Band. He reinterpreted Russian folk songs, and never stopped – his new album includes Celtic folk music, some reggae rhythms and pop music hooks.

“I’m still continuing to look for a new spark to fire up my imagination,” he wrote. “A bit of fire never hurts, does it?”

Along the way, he picked up painting as well. The TurnPark show, “Portal,” will feature 14 works — seven of which haven’t been shown before. They will be on display until June 18 and then go on to a show in Italy. The images are comic-inspired scenes with mythical beasts and fantastic cities, where Christian, Hindu and Buddhist iconography meet in bright colors lit by Grebenshchikov’s signature humor and goodwill.

“I never learned to paint; it came by itself,” he said. “Long ago, in my wife’s attic, I found some oil paints and brushes and canvases, and could not resist the temptation. I had so much fun, I started to paint on a regular basis.”

Brezgunova said it was a natural fit for the park.

“From the very beginning when we started the project, it was to create a space where people of any language could express themselves freely and creatively,” she said. “We deeply respect [Grebenshchikov’s] ability to follow his own way, and we think that we also follow our own way.”

That moral consistency in Grebenshchikov’s work is as important now as ever. Throughout his career, his politics were rarely specific, but he always spoke for personal freedom. That was at odds with the Putin regime as it consolidated power, and reached a whole new level after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In summer 2023, Grebenshchikov was listed by the regime as a “foreign agent,” a de facto blacklist. He now lives in London, but doesn’t consider himself an exile.

“Most of my life I felt a bit locked in a certain part of the world and knew I’ll never see the rest of it,” he wrote. “I dearly love Russia, but wanted to experience the rest of the world. So now I’m living in a different country, which suits me fine. Furthermore, London is good for music, which is what I need.”

There is irony in beginning under the eye of a repressive regime and now finding himself there again, but he said what endures is the urge to create, which not only fills a role but “lights up our lives with divine light.”

“In terrible and absurd times like ours, this light carries us through the mire and restores our dignity, that we need to go on with our lives,” he said. “We needed it during Soviet times, and need it more and more each day. And I certainly cherish and love it for all my life.”

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Christopher Marcisz