

Veteran Jazz Legend Feigin Brings Fest to Moscow

By [Sergey Chernov](#)

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The Leo Feigin Festival, a series of large-scale avant-garde jazz events celebrating Russian-born, Britain-based producer and long-time BBC Russian service music presenter Leo Feigin, started last week in St. Petersburg and will head to Moscow on Tuesday.

This year's festival — the third since it was first held — is dedicated to the 35th anniversary of Feigin's record label, Leo Records, and will tour seven Russian cities in total.

Launched in February 2012 by Feigin and Moscow-based saxophone player Alexei Kruglov, who leads his own ensemble Krugly Band, the Leo Feigin Festival features both Leo Records artists and those similar in spirit.

"There will be a huge number of musicians taking part, especially in Moscow, and due to the

support from the Goethe Institute, we'll have foreign acts for the first time," said Feigin via Skype.

According to Feigin, the Moscow part of the festival also will be filmed for a future documentary with director Oksana Mاتيyeвskaya. "We will film as much as possible with her and hopefully something will come out of it," he said.

Born in Leningrad in 1938, Feigin was forced by the KGB to leave the Soviet Union in 1973 following his meeting with legendary U.S. jazz broadcaster Willis Conover. After a short stint in Israel, he landed in London in 1974, where he started to work at the BBC Russian service. For more than 25 years he presented a weekly jazz show under his radio name Alexei Leonidov, as well as daily news stories. He formed Leo Records in London in 1979, inspired by a smuggled tape by the Vilnius-based Ganelin Trio.

Since then, the Leo Records label has released hundreds of records by highly innovative artists, including The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor. However, perhaps more importantly, it was Leo Records that introduced to the world both groundbreaking and then internationally obscure Soviet acts such as the Ganelin Trio, Anatoly Vapіrov Trio and the late St. Petersburg pianist Sergei Kuryokhin. To protect them from persecution from the Soviet authorities, Feigin put a notice to his records saying that the musicians "do not bear responsibility for releasing this tape."

Turning 35 this year, Leo Records continues to release albums, although Feigin acknowledges the hardships of the Internet era.

"It gets harder and harder with every year because the Internet crushes everything. People don't want to buy compact disks anymore and everybody wants music for free," Feigin said.

"But nevertheless ... I simply have no other way out and I can't do anything but release disks and promote them. The catalogue has now reached an incredible size — it has more than 800 titles! It is a giant label that drags me behind, despite me trying to resist. Everybody says to me, 'Make it 1,000 releases, and you can retire after that.'"

In an interview, Kruglov said the idea of the festival came to both Feigin and him while on tour in Britain.

"The idea of creating a Leo Records festival occurred to Leo and me in England, when Leo organized a tour called Leo International Tour, where we performed with Estonian guitarist Jaak Sooäär," Kruglov said.

"During that tour, we decided that something like this should be done in Russia. As we were in deep conversation with Vyacheslav Ganelin at the time, we put together the first festival within three or four months."

Originally, the festival was conceived as a festival of Leo Records artists, but more and more festival "guests" — artists who have not yet released anything on the label yet performed music in its style — started to participate in the Leo Feigin Festival as time passed, Kruglov said.

"Many young bands, such as Metro 3 or Godze, both from Moscow, are not yet Leo Records

artists, but they perform in similar style, pursuing a non-standard approach, interesting sound, being in a creative search — all in all working in similar direction. It would not be right not to invite them because we're open to all the projects. The main thing is that it would be interesting ... it should have something new about it. But, of course, the Leo Records artists take priority."

Leo Records Festival will play Sept. 9. At 7 p.m. National Center for Contemporary Arts. 13 Zoologicheskaya Ulitsa, building 2. Metro Krasnopresnenskaya. Free. 499-254-0674. For other dates, see www.alexkruglov.ru.

Contact the author at artsreporter@imedia.ru

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