

THE BEST MUSICIAN I KNOW

by Ivan Dimitrov

translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

M. had always made an amazing impression on me, but to be frank, I had never – before hearing the following story – thought of him as the best musician I know. He is the singer in one past and one present group. The first was more traditional, the second – more experimental. Both were pretty popular. He also composes electronic music. I know it sounds strange to say that somebody composes electronic music, it's more fitting to say that they “make” it or “mix” it. Only he composes, let the others make it and mix it as much as they want.

M. works as a graphic designer and, like countless other musicians, makes ends meet doing something else. In his free time he loves to travel. He most often takes off for a week or two at a time. He has gone to India, Nepal, Thailand, China. He had been wanting to go to Latin America since forever, and when a friend of his invited him to visit Venezuela, he took him up on it right away.

Reality immediately smashed his romantic idea of the country. The central streets were fenced in by high walls and barbed wire. People owned weapons en masse and did not hesitate to use them. Years ago Chavez had handed out several million guns in the ghettos to keep the revolution alive. M. couldn't say whether the revolution was alive or not, but there was no way he could help noticing that quite a few people had died, not because of it, but just like that.

If they want to steal your cell phone, they shoot you first and then take it. On the very first day, they were forced to take cover behind an old car while some teenagers blew each other away. And once when he was walking alone, because he wasn't afraid, I'm an Eastern European, right, he thought to himself, who's gonna jump me, two kids around twenty, indistinguishable from all the other punks he'd run across on the street, pulled him into an out-of-the-way, dead-end alley and pointed a gun at him. They told him in English to take off his sneakers, to give them his backpack and empty his pockets. M., however, really didn't feel like parting with the backpack – that night he was invited to a party and his mixer and laptop were inside. He was fond of his sneakers, too. But these guys were holding the gun to his head. He had to act.

Whether consciously, whether spontaneously, he himself couldn't say – M. started beat-boxing, laying down some bad-ass freestyle, busting a move. Just imagine it. Those

punks were pointing a gun at him, and he's dancing and singing. He forgot where he was. The world was song and dance and everything that wasn't song and dance had disappeared, had ceased to exist, sunk into the rhythm and melody.

A minute or fifteen later, no one can say, his performance ended. Those guys, frozen to the spot, looked at him bug-eyed. The gun was still pressed to his head, it could go off at any second and game over – his body would fall to the ground and the song and dance that had conducted it until that moment would fly off somewhere with part of his brain. At such moments, they say, your life passes before your eyes like a film, but nothing passed before his. After the performance, he felt empty. His fear of death had fallen silent.

And the gun was silent, too, but the kids busted out clapping. They applauded and hollered, enjoying themselves thoroughly. They put away the gun, told him he was really good and took off.

And that's why M. is the best musician I know.